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OUTLOOK

NATIONAL
LESBIAN
& GAY
QUARTERLY

Who's Afraid of EDWARD ALBEE?

When Writers' Worlds Collide

AIDS SURVIVOR *guilt*

POMO AFRO HOMOS

lesbians & gay men **in SPORTS**

Plus: **Alison Bechdel, Gil Cuadros, Robert Duncan, Jeffrey Escoffier, Monica Palacios,** & **Urvashi Vaid**

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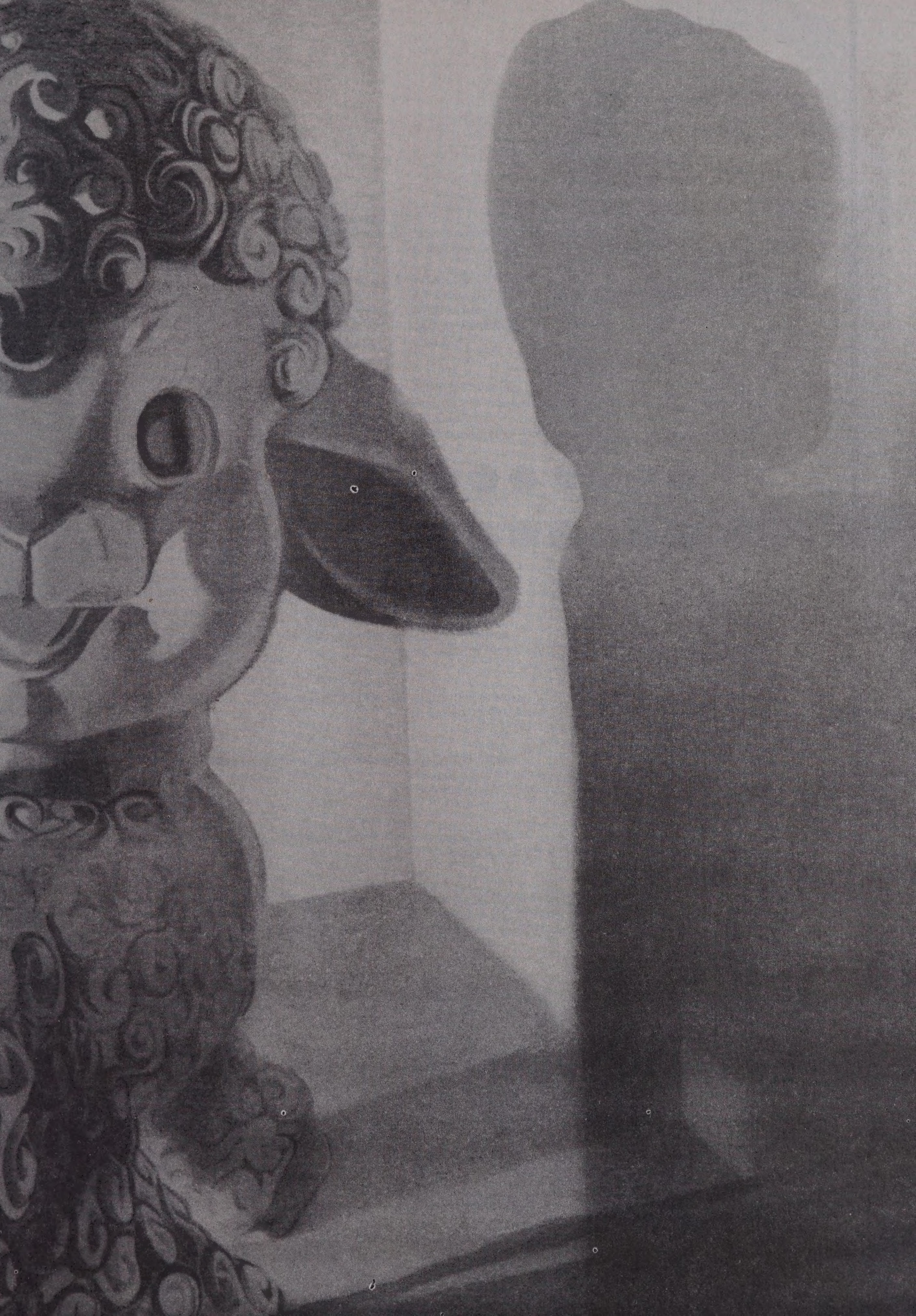

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PORTFOLIO

Situation 8 New Langton Arts/San Francisco
A dialogue between lesbian and gay artists

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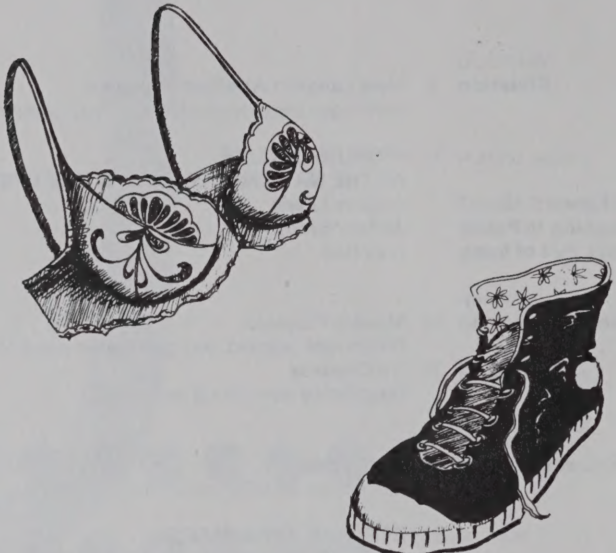


Over the last year, more than ever, we at *OUT/LOOK* have found ourselves squarely in the middle of the debates about multiculturalism taking place in the universities and in the press. It's ironic that while lesbians and gays are perceived as a threat to our social foundations, the debates that run through broader society run through our own communities.

Much of the press coverage of multiculturalism reflects a pervasive cultural anxiety about deep structural changes taking place in the US. Some publications have gone so far as to call multiculturalism a "cult." While much of the writing in the mainstream press has been biased and shrill (if not downright defensive), in this issue we hope to illuminate the debate from a different perspective—the inside.

If you were able to sit in on one of our editorial board meetings, to hear what animates our political disagreements and what makes us laugh, you would realize we don't pretend to be the politically correct voice of America (as Bob Satuloff recently argued in *Christopher Street*). *OUT/LOOK* is a co-sexual, multicultural project, based on the idea that lesbian and gay culture has unique and worthwhile contributions to make to society at large, and that we can benefit by reading, seeing, and talking about the differences in class, generational, and ethnic backgrounds in our communities. We don't expect to make everyone happy when we do this—the product of our interaction is often provocative writing with an edge, sometimes one of anger.

The concrete implications of multicultural dynamics were played out quite clearly at OutWrite '91 National Lesbian and Gay Writers Conference in March. Hallways and panel discussions were filled with heated argument and debate sparked by Edward Albee's keynote speech. By the end of the conference Albee had become a symbol for several related issues: who determines the power structure of the lesbian and gay literary community, and as a result, whose voices have access to print.

In this issue's special section, we've asked three writers to think about the implications of multiculturalism, and how they played out at the writers' conference. Andrea Lewis, a Black lesbian journalist, talks about her reactions to Albee's speech; Lisa Hall compares her experience organizing OutWrite to that of organizing women of color conferences; and *OUT/LOOK* publisher Jeffrey Escoffier makes a call for more public discussion of the difficult issues our multicultural society must confront. To help give you a feeling for the conference, we've also excerpted parts of Albee's speech, and parts of a statement signed by lesbians and gay men of African descent at a conference caucus.

The United States is changing—multiculturalism is the American *perestroika*, and it has already had far-reaching implications for the way we live our lives. The armed services, corporate America, the education system are all struggling to adapt to these changes. *OUT/LOOK* is dealing with them as well. The editorial board incorporates people of color in a structural rather than token manner, and we hope the results are as thought-provoking for you as they are for us. As readers, you too are a part of this ongoing dialogue, and we look forward to receiving your letters.

Robin Stevens
Managing Editor

Illustrations by Dyan Garza

GAY HISTORY AND MCC

Nancy L. Wilson's article "Soul and Body" in Issue 13 makes the extraordinary assertion that "it was at Metropolitan Community Church that gays and lesbians in the US first gathered in large groups openly in the daylight." She further asserts that the movement is a little more than 20 years old. While I would not wish to underestimate the importance of Stonewall, or overlook the contributions of Troy Perry and MCC, both of her statements are incorrect.

Troy Perry met with his first congregation of 12 people on October 6, 1968. ONE was suing the postal authorities as early as 1954, and the Society for Individual Rights was holding public gatherings in San Francisco by 1964. Also in 1964, the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations held the first of five annual demonstrations on July 4th, at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, and in 1967 several homosexual organizations participated in the Black Cat Nightclub demonstration against police harassment in Los Angeles.

These actions come readily to mind, but it is far from an inclusive list. Our community has any number of individual historians and archival repositories throughout the country that can be used to verify historical statements with a simple phone call. One sign of a mature community is its respect for its own history.

Rich Wandel
Center Archivist
National Museum of Lesbian and Gay History
New York, NY

LESBIANS & THE MILITARY

I was pleased and surprised by your special section on lesbians in the military. I must also add that I was put off a bit by the fact that Allan Bérubé, although deserving of many accolades, finds this a way to further his work in print. While his book, *Coming Out Under Fire*, has been a great contribution to the issue of gays in the military, it deals primarily with World War II.

There are many others, including my own book, *My Country, My Right to Serve*, that are much more current in their content and direction. But I am slow to realize that there is definitely a political issue involved in who gets what press. I do appreciate the mention of my book on the last page of the section, but it would have been a bit more professional of your staff to have spelled my name correctly!

Dr. Mary Ann Humphrey
Portland, OR

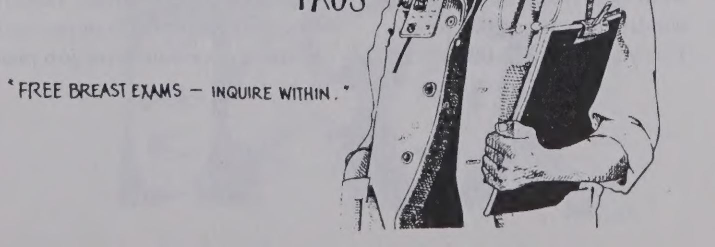
LESBIAN IV DRUG USERS?

So—the lesbian community would be "enriched" by the inclusion therein of "sex with men for drugs or money, affiliation with male drug users," affiliation with johns/straight male voyeurs, and rip-offs (and the disauthentication of personal interaction that goes along with druggie scams and rip-offs)? As someone who has used drugs to the point of addiction, and has thus been familiar with the culture with which Risa Denenberg would have us engage in "dialogue," I seriously doubt it.

Lesbians are told by society that we are worthless losers, and too many women internalize that notion. That is why we have worked for 35 years to build alternatives to that self-concept, alternatives to subcultures that internalize our marginalization. This is a sign of intelligence and caring, not "snobbery," "racism," or "denial." Giving IV drug users the message that their behavior and culture are welcome in a community aiming to support, empower and validate women whom society wants to fail is a very bad idea. Supporting drug addiction treatment programs for lesbians is a better idea.

Denenberg doesn't care one bit about lesbians and the women's community. If she and Cynthia Acevedo believe lesbians "have been infected with HIV through sex with women," let them prove it; the medical journals (and the CDC) are still waiting for one of these anecdotal cases to turn out to be real.

Beth Elliott
Oakland, CA



Kris Kovick

In Issue 11, we surveyed OUT/LOOK *readers about religion and spirituality and invited you to send letters to explain your views. To follow are a sampling of some of your thoughts — see the Queery results in this issue for a more comprehensive, statistical analysis of reader response.*

RELIGION: SOLUTION OR PROBLEM?

My own faith as a Christian is something I can't explain, yet it sustains me through all manner of life's experiences. I often find myself feeling sorry for those who have no belief, because I feel so rewarded, so lifted up by my spirituality. And while I embrace the institution as giving me a vital link to 2,000 years of tradition and belief, I feel free to disagree with those aspects which seem to me to be wrong. After all, it is an institution created by *people*, and as any Christian knows, all people are imperfect. It is not God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit that has led to persecution and hate; it is individual people's human error which led to the many mistakes made by the church as a whole.

Washington, D.C.

I wasted two decades of my life kowtowing to a Protestant God; then, when it finally dawned upon me that I was gay, I attempted to expiate my supposed "sin" further by embracing Catholicism. I became involved in it up to my ears. As is the case with the majority of Christians, practically all I knew about the Bible was what I'd heard in sermons: God loves all creation except queers. So I went on a real guilt trip, even winding up in psychotherapy. Five years and $15,000 later, I was just as queer and just as uptight trying to reconcile my sexual orientation with the Judeo-Christian God.

Then, lying in bed in the dark one night, the solution hit me: I didn't have to believe in *any* deity or holy book or redeemer or ritual or plan of salvation. I began in earnest a study of religion in general and of the Bible in particular, and were my eyes ever opened! Religion is nothing more than ritualized claptrap, and the Bible is fraud from Genesis to the Revelation.

Hughesville, PA

My experience of growing up as a fundamentalist Christian gave me valuable experience with marginality which is useful as a lesbian. It was damaging in many other ways, but I feel at home in the fringes.

Cleveland Heights, OH

SPIRITUALITY ≠ RELIGION

The most important part of my personal spiritual life is my meditation practice. I wish there had been a place to give that response on your questionnaire.

I consider anything that makes me feel *whole* (complete in mind, body, and spirit) to be part of my spiritual life. I often feel whole, energized, joyous, and connected to the rest of humanity while dancing to exciting music at Gay bars. Giving and receiving massage is also a spiritual act for me. Going to local Men's Council meetings (which are mixed gay/straight/bisexual) which can include sweat lodges, mask-making, wrestling, drumming, and storytelling fills part of my longing for spiritual fulfillment. The creative expression and opportunity for service which my job provides is one aspect of my search for completeness/enlightenment/fulfillment. Sexual expression is another important aspect of this search.

Boulder, CO

Because so many of us have lived with one foot in two worlds ("gay" and "straight"), we have developed a kind of stereovision that enables us to see the world from more than just one side. I think this is also true of religion and spirituality. Many of us have had to work around thought paradigms that exist in much (most?) of organized religion. At the same time, this trek has led many of us toward developing our own unique type of spirituality. The latter is true of me, as I was raised a devout atheist and am now a practicing witch.

By the way, I do take umbrage at the fact that Wicca was lumped with "new age" trains of thought. Not that there aren't similarities here and there, but as one who practices what is often called the Old Religion, I think lumping it with new-age consciousness a bit misleading.

Chicago, IL

AIDS & SPIRITUALITY

Persons whose lives are touched by AIDS may find some spiritual meaning in their lives that they did not have before, but that does not mean that the spiritual meaning is in AIDS itself. I think our *response* to AIDS in our own lives is where the meaning may be found, not in the disease.

God is not in AIDS. God did not send AIDS. God is in our fight against AIDS, and in our struggle with those who have AIDS or who are HIV-positive. Saying AIDS *is* meant … AIDS *was* created … AIDS *is* punishment, etc., assumes that we can make some definitive spiritual statement about the disease. I think some people may find spiritual meaning in their lives through their experiences with AIDS, but that does not mean this will be true for everyone.

Union Theological Seminary
New York, NY

It seems to me that there is a connection between the AIDS epidemic and the recent re-emergence of the spiritual movement. One can be a catalyst for the other. If you approach spirituality from a holistic perspective, then you must see the relationship between physical health and spiritual health. While I do not characterize AIDS as a gift, I do see it as an opportunity to take what is otherwise a devastatingly negative situation and turn it around; to use it as a tool in teaching us to remember what we all know about the body as a self-healing organism; to teach us how to take responsibility for our health; to understand the correlation between what we eat, think, and breathe, and disease; and to teach us to take back the power we have given over to the medical establishment. By doing this we embrace our connection to the natural cycles of the earth and every living and non-living thing on it—we have respect for all things, big and small. This to me lies at the very heart of what is spiritual, and I believe it is especially important in this age of AIDS. We have a tendency in this society to be in a crisis situation before we are willing to take action or make change. AIDS is a crisis, and I don't believe we can afford to make small changes. I think we are at a point in history which calls for a complete re-evaluation of our existing belief systems, and a fresh look at some very ancient principles, which as lesbians and gay men, we seem always to have been involved in.

Brooklyn, NY

THE HOMO-SACRED

If gay men and women do have a greater propensity or capacity for spirituality, it is not apparent or obvious. It may be that we are only more likely to be searching for a spiritual/philosophical framework which acknowledges, affirms, and informs our own experience. We may also be more likely to embrace false gods.

New Britain, CT

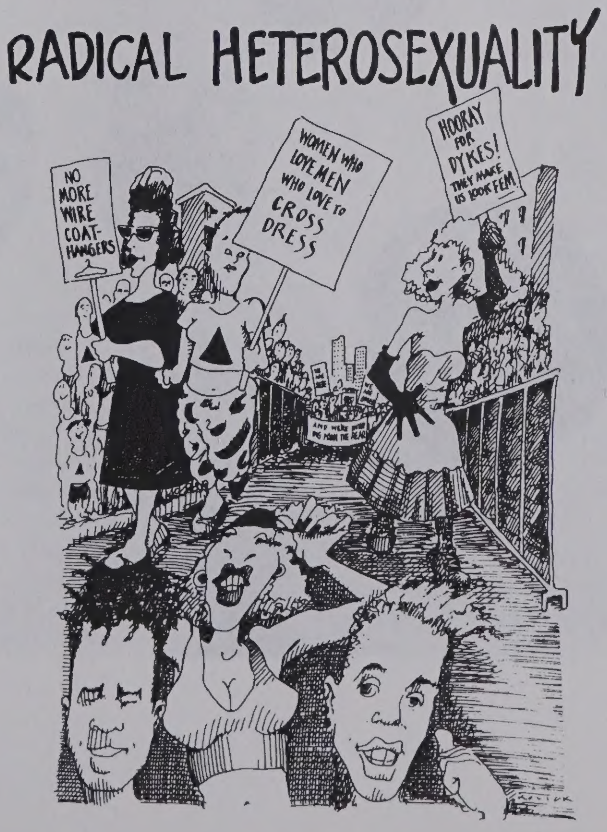
I have thought deeply about the connection of homosexuality and spirituality and have come to a few obvious conclusions, but I have not thought about them deeply enough to be sure of myself.

I do believe the connection lies in our being different in our society but not outwardly so. So we grow up very sensitive to our surroundings trying to find out if we are the only ones like this. And I believe by developing this almost "third eye"—by being so aware—we have conditioned ourselves to spiritual awareness.

Bennington, VT

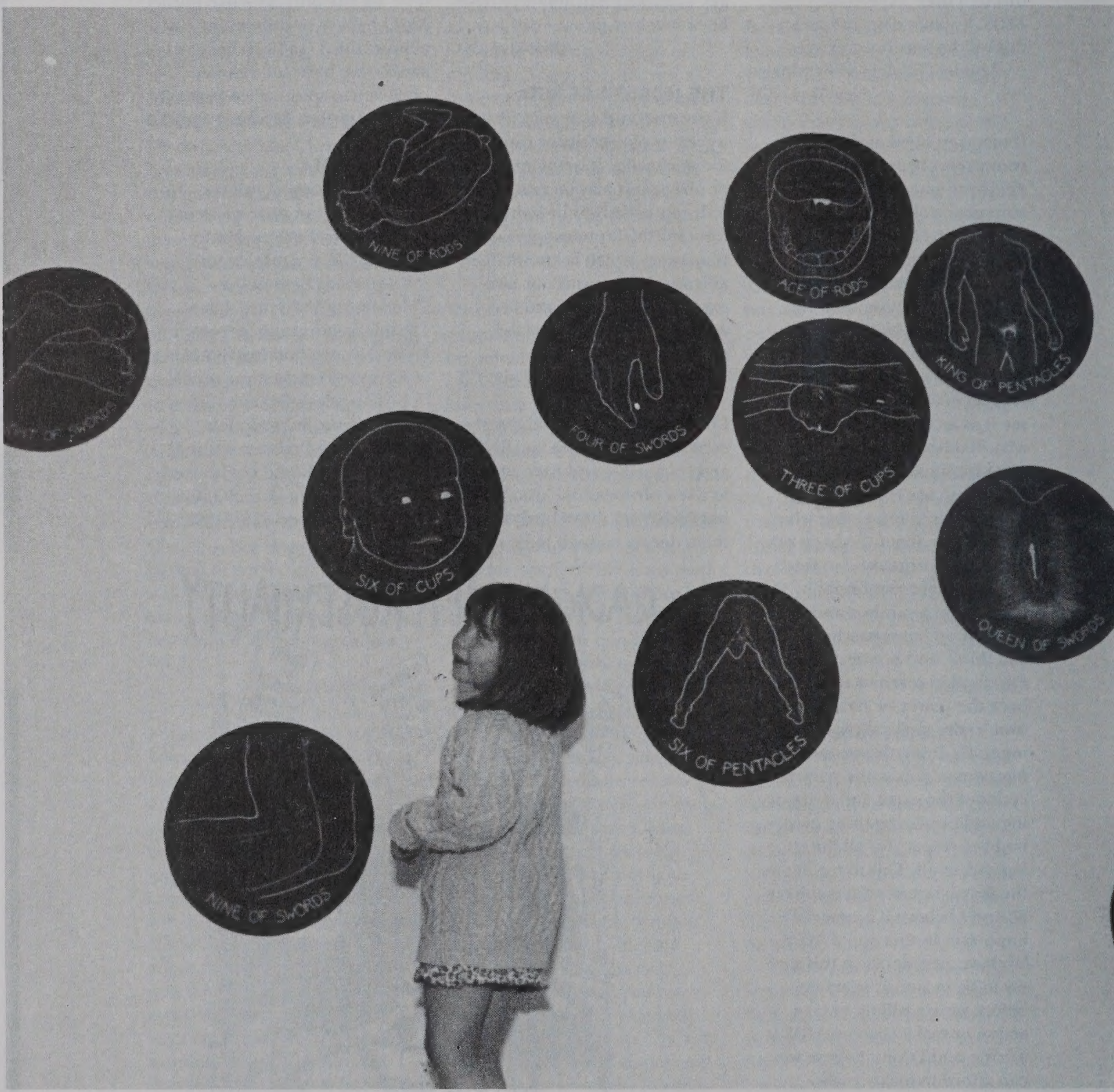
FAUX PAS!

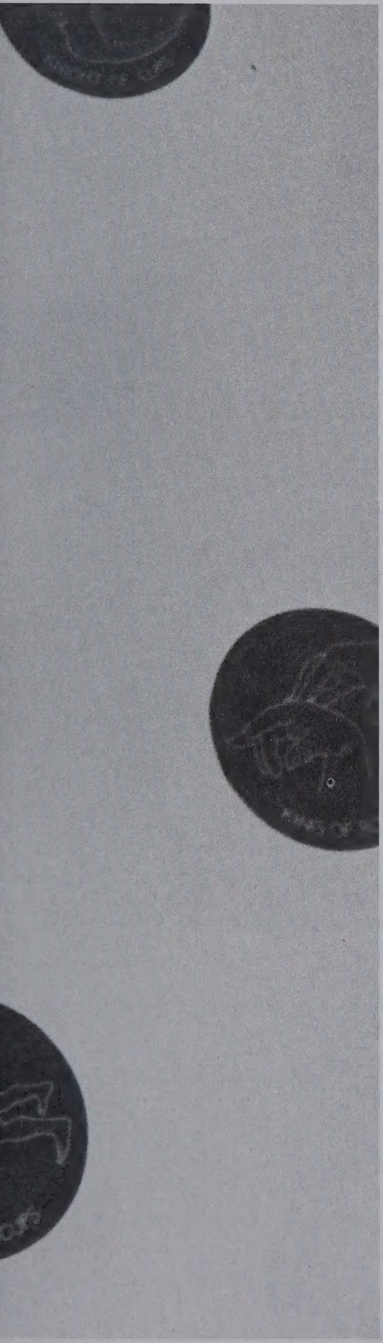
As the editors were putting together the last issue we were so dazzled by Enrique Marie Presley's life as a celebutante ("Unmasked! Behind the Celebutante Mystique," Issue 13) that we forgot to let people know they can find installments of Enrique's celebutante serial in Los Angeles's fabulous Sin Bros. fanzine. Subscription, back issue, and current/future issue queries should be directed to: Sin Bros., c/o W.K. PO Box 618, N. Hollywood, CA 91603.


RADICAL HETEROSEXUALITY
NO MORE WIRE COAT-HANGERS
WOMEN WHO LOVE MEN WHO LOVE TO CROSS DRESS
HOORAY FOR DYKES! THEY MAKE US LOOK FEM

Kris Kovick

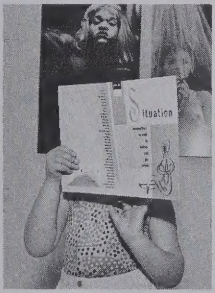
David Dashiell *Autobiography (Part III of "Invert, Oracle")*, 1988 *(photo credit: Blake Sorrell)*


NINE OF RODS
ACE OF RODS
T OF SWORDS
FOUR OF SWORDS
KING OF PENTACLES
THREE OF CUPS
SIX OF CUPS
QUEEN OF SWORDS
SIX OF PENTACLES
NINE OF SWORDS



Situation

This exhibition was conceived as part of a continuing dialogue about lesbian and gay art practices ... *Situation* is an intersection of multiple lesbian and gay cultural identities and histories. Acknowledging the divergent voices that make up this complex community, the exhibition highlights the shared territory that has been negotiated by different people in vastly different ways. The work addresses such subjects as: religion, pop/mass culture, race, AIDS, cross-dressing, academic canons, porn, and feminism, among others. — Pam Gregg, Curator



These artists are willing to adopt any voice, from art historical, to psychoanalytic, to documentary, to pop cultural, in order to make that voice speak queerly. This is a marked departure from previous attempts to essentialize gay voices. These artists do not assume any sort of truly gay way of making work. Instead, they use a position of gayness to skew standard ways of making and reading. — Nayland Blake, Curator

As one part of their refusal to be ghettoized, lesbian and gay artists are producing work which is not always or immediately recognizable as "other" to mainstream art and media. In many cases, queer artists are raiding the "closet" of heterosexual culture by appropriating mass-media imagery and then manipulating it according to their own sensibility and desires. — Richard Meyer*

There's the question of the whole notion of "lesbian and gay" art-making, as if these could be talked about in the same terms, when gay male artists are so often so well plugged-in — to social networks, to systems of exhibition and critical attention, to the kinds of interplay that are simultaneously sexual, political, and professional—when most women, whether gay, straight, or somewhere in between, remain relatively isolated and marginalized.—Liz Kotz*

(Above) Four year old, Max, accompanied by her father, photographer Blake Sorrell, tours Situation at San Francisco's New Langton Gallery.

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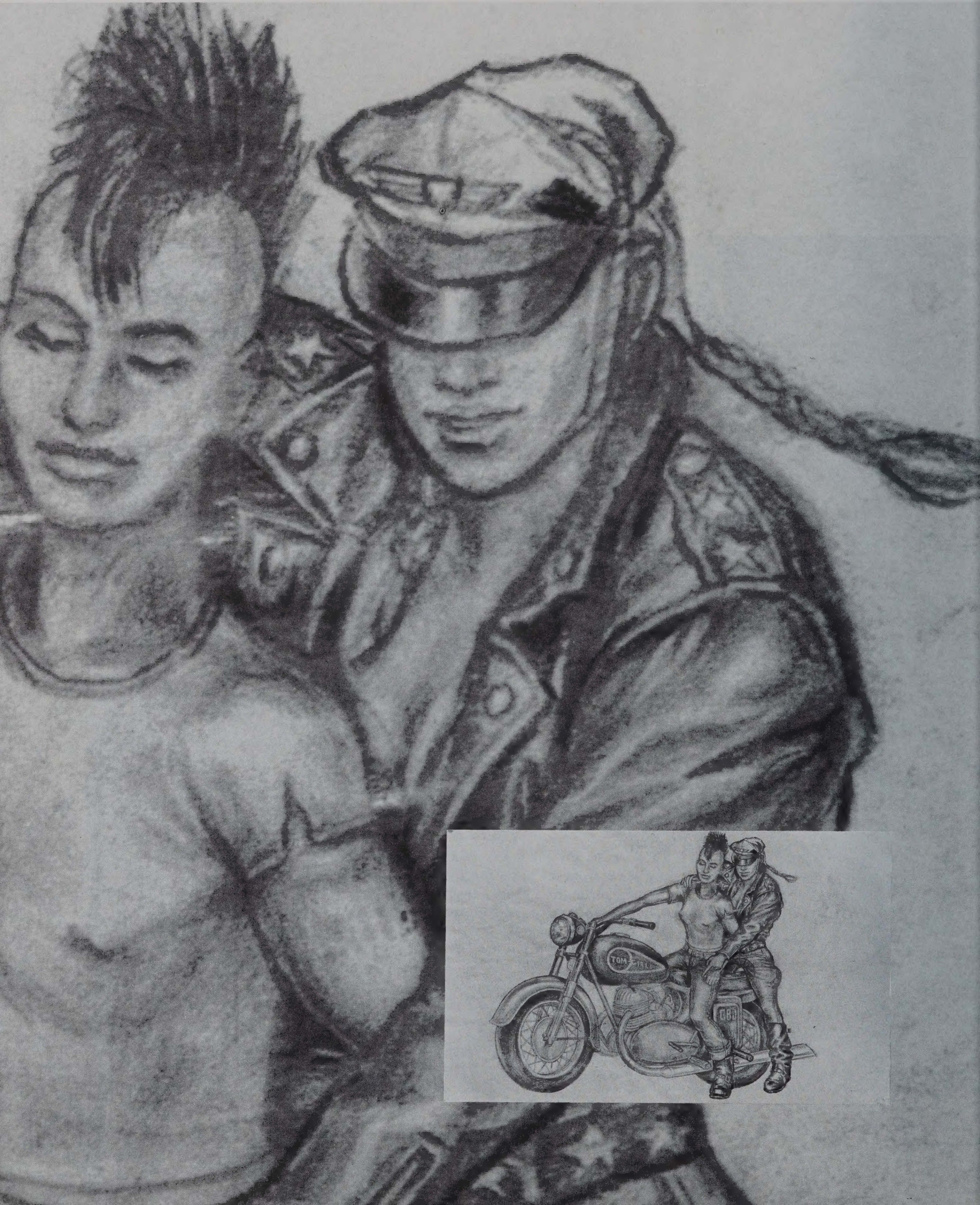
*From *Situation*'s exhibition catalog.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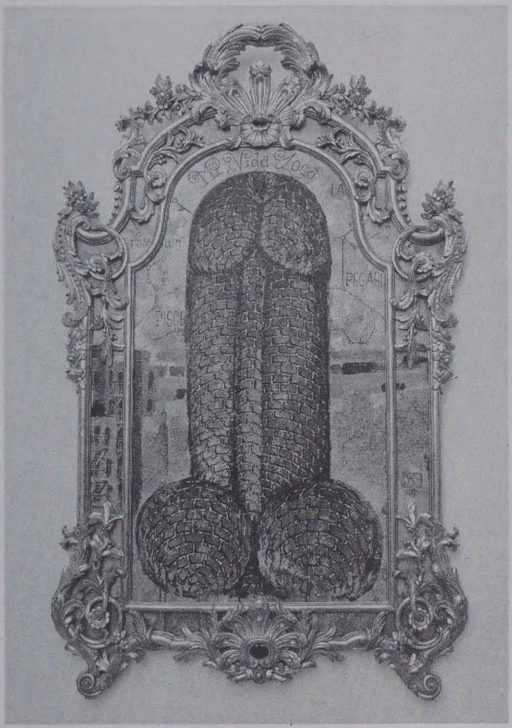
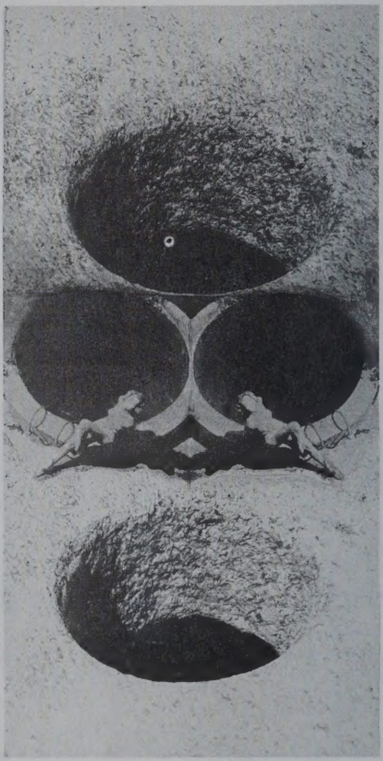


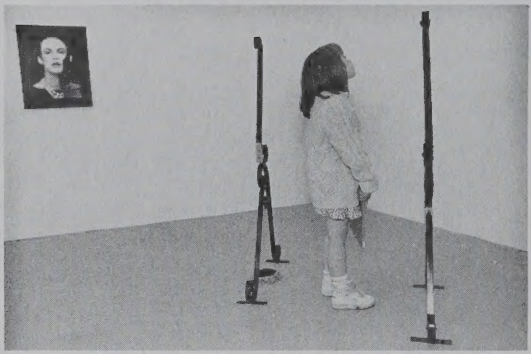
Martin Wong *Big Brick Dick Painting,* 1991 *(photo credit: Sixth Street Studios)*

The meaning, or at least the reception, of such anti-monumental strategies seems vastly different for men and for women — since for male artists, the use of everyday, "low" materials or informal presentation strategies is clearly readable as a choice, while in work by women it can just as easily be read as "amateur"—not serious art. In pushing these boundaries of artmaking, engaging different audiences, aesthetics, and contexts, the risks for women may be much higher. —Liz Kotz

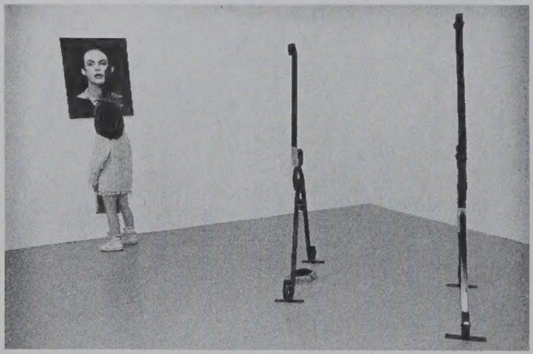
G.B. Jones *Motorcycle Girls* *(photo credit: Sixth Street Studios)*



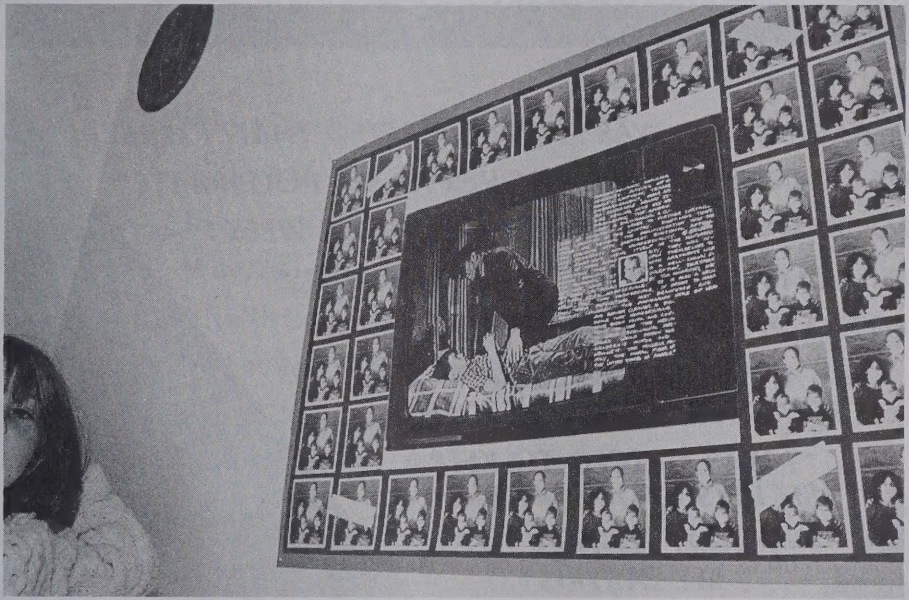
Joy Episalla
Picnic on the Industrial Grass #1,
1991
(photo credit Sixth Street Studios)



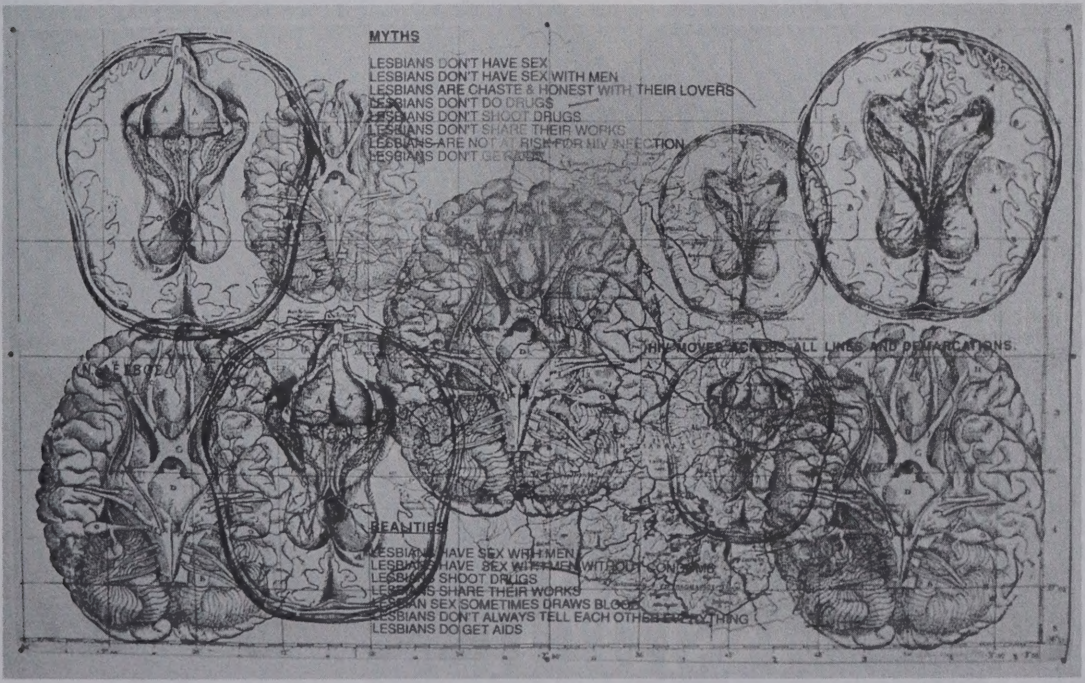
Left:: Hunter Reynolds *Untitled Drag Pose,* 1990
Right: D.L. Alvarez *Flourish (pair)*, 1991
(photo credit: Blake Sorrell)



Connie Samaras *Paranoid Delusions,* 1985 *(photo credit:Blake Sorrell)*



Cynthia Madansky *Untitled,* 1991 *(photo credit: Blake Sorrell)*


MYTHS
LESBIANS DON'T HAVE SEX
LESBIANS DON'T HAVE SEX WITH MEN
LESBIANS ARE CHASTE & HONEST WITH THEIR LOVERS
LESBIANS DON'T DO DRUGS
LESBIANS DON'T SHOOT DRUGS
LESBIANS DON'T SHARE THEIR WORKS
LESBIANS ARE NOT AT RISK FOR HIV INFECTION
LESBIANS DON'T GET AIDS
HIV MOVES ACROSS ALL LINES AND DEMARCATIONS.
REALITIES
LESBIANS HAVE SEX WITH MEN
LESBIANS HAVE SEX WITH MEN WITHOUT CONDOMS
LESBIANS SHOOT DRUGS
LESBIANS SHARE THEIR WORKS
LESBIAN SEX SOMETIMES DRAWS BLOOD
LESBIANS DON'T ALWAYS TELL EACH OTHER EVERYTHING
LESBIANS DO GET AIDS

MANY TREATMENT CENTERS CLAIM THAT
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"GAY PROGRAMMING WAS ONLY 2 HOURS A WEEK"

"STAFF MEMBERS REVEALED MY HIV STATUS"

"PEOPLE REFUSED TO ROOM WITH ME"

"MY AFTERCARE REFERRAL WAS A STRAIGHT COUPLES GROUP"

"I WAS FORCED TO KEEP SECRETS ABOUT MY LIFE"

"I HAD TO TAKE OFF MY LABYRIS"

"OTHER PATIENTS WHISPERED AND POINTED AT US"

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Carolyn Cutler

Strong young women
Will wheel our chairs into the dining hall
In reverent tones they will ask
What we did for the revolution
They'll beg to look at our newspaper clippings
Old slides, and photograph albums,
Spend hours asking their sweet questions
With entranced looks on their unlined faces.

There'll be annual outings to womyn's music festivals:
A special area just for us
Because we're old and frail
Because we've lived through it all and
Because our parties are the loudest.

And a library with all the books we've loved
Political analyses, feminist critiques,
Lesbian mysteries,
And love stories.
Deconstructive discussion groups
And poetry readings every week.
An art gallery,
An orchestra,
And the latest in word processors.

In the lesbian nursing home, my dearest one,
There'll be soft flannel sheets on the double bed.
We'll lock our bedroom door.

Worlds Collide at the National

Photographs by Isa Massu;
Masks by Bonita Barlow, William Samios, and Rob Zaborny

WHO'S AFRAID OF EDWARD ALBEE?

Andrea Lewis

When I arrived at San Francisco's Cathedral Hill Hotel for the first sessions of the OutWrite '91 conference, I was struck by the vision of hundreds of lesbian and gay writers from around the country, occupying every available space, every corner, and every chair in sight. A tremendously diverse mix of gay men and lesbians of all shapes, sizes, ages, races, classes, and interests, had

continued on page 19

Lesbian & Gay Writers Conference

SPECIAL SECTION

CHOCK FULL OF IRONY

Lisa Hall

My life is just chock-full of irony—as a lesbian, nationalist, feminist, academic, activist, poet, and sometime housecleaner I can usually be found knee-deep in some bizarrely contradictory activity. Writing about "multicultural organizing" and my work organizing the last two OutWrite lesbian and gay writers conferences is just another one of these moments. Ironic

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ARGUING IN PUBLIC

Jeffrey Escoffier

American society is changing. It is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse; more polarized along class lines; more publicly obsessed with lesbians, gay men, and other sexual minorities; more conscious of gender differences; and as a result, increasingly preoccupied with political conflict over issues of representation.

I mean "representation" in two senses of

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Edward Albee: **ONE "MINORITY" SPEAKS TO ANOTHER**

I am many things. In this world, on this planet, I am white; I am therefore in a minority. In the world, and certainly in the United States, I am a male. Therefore, I am in a minority. I am a WASP, more accurately referred to as an ASP since I have discovered no Black Anglo-Saxon Protestants. There too, I am in a minority. I am deeply mired in my middle-age; there again I am in a minority. I am a college professor, which puts me in a minority, I am a writer, which puts me in a minority; and I am gay, which also puts me in a minority. I find all of these minorities very, very interesting. I have found that none of them have gotten in my way or stopped me from saying exactly what I have wanted to say as a writer and as everything else in my life.

I think that an important distinction has got to be made, however, between a writer who is gay and a gay writer. What I really want to talk about briefly, tonight, has to do ultimately with civil rights. I have been profoundly involved in a lot of civil rights movements. I have been around a lot longer than the majority of you have. I was there at Stonewall. I began to watch the emergence of an important civil rights movement, a second civil rights movement equal in importance to the racial civil rights movement in our country. But at the same time I see the same dangers in our civil rights movement that I have found taking place in other civil rights movements....

We are a fragile thing called a democracy, and our Constitution and our Bill of Rights gives us all sorts of protections and adequacies, if you will, under the law. Many of them have been fought for, desperately. The civil rights movement of Blacks in this country, and to a lesser extent of other minorities, was a hard fought battle and it is not over. And one of the things that has gotten in the way of public acceptance of Blacks in this country is an extraordinary growing separatism on the part of many Blacks, a retreat from participation [*audible jeers from audience*]... let me finish, now come on, I said we were a democracy, be quiet ... is an understandable separatism which has made it more and more difficult for a number of people who would have been quite happy to let the entire issue drop. It makes it impossible. I don't want this to happen to the gay civil rights movement. I don't wish us to be ghettoized. I don't wish it to be impossible for us to be accepted for whom we wish to be accepted. As a writer I plan to go on telling the truth. If I am informed that since I am a gay writer I must only write about gay themes, I will say no. My intention is, and I hope that my sensibility is, such that it transcends my gayness and has something to do with the pain and the needs of all of us. I will say no, I will not limit what I write to gay themes. Because being gay is merely one of the many things that everybody in this room is.

Excerpted from his keynote address at OutWrite '91.

come together to celebrate their shared experiences as writers. The diversity was also apparent in the program for the conference—panels on Chicano/Chicana writing, sexuality and disability, working class writing, with panelists such as Cherríe Moraga, Allan Bérubé, Chrystos, Kate Clinton, Urvashi Vaid, and several lesser-knowns like myself. I was as excited about attending these other workshops as I was nervous about serving as a panelist on one called "Journalism Outside of a Gay Context."

But before participants could warm up their seats, OutWrite '91 was thrown an unexpected curve. At the very beginning of the conference, the issue of diversity invoked controversy, anger, and frustration as award-winning writer Edward Albee, author of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and the last of four keynote speakers, spoke about ghettoization, separatism, and being a minority. "I am many things," he said. "In every case, I am a member of a minority. I have found none of them have gotten in my way and stopped me from saying exactly what I have wanted to say as a writer and as everything else in my life." A short time later during his sixteen-minute speech Albee said, "One of the things that has gotten in the way of public acceptance of Blacks in this country is an extraordinary growing separatism ... a retreat from participation ... which has made it more and more difficult for a number of people who would have been quite happy to let the entire issue drop. I don't want this to happen to the gay civil rights movement.... We must be desperately careful of ghettoization, we must be desperately careful of separatism."

Reaction to Albee's statements ranged from stunned silence to vigorous applause. While a small group—primarily of white men—gave Albee a standing ovation, most people of color, and a large number of whites, were shocked and offended by his remarks. Virtually everyone felt disappointed with the tone Albee's keynote set and throughout the rest of the weekend, his speech was the major point of discussion in and out of the workshops. Panelists and conference participants repeatedly touched on issues that Albee raised and many openly criticized his statements. At a gathering of the People of Color Caucus at the very end of the conference, the emotion was highly pitched. "Many of us took serious objection to points made in [Albee's] speech," says

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AD HOC CAUCUS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

We recommend that keynote speakers better reflect the multiculturalism of the community.

... that persons of color be included on every panel, and that persons of color serve as moderators.

... that the organizers affirm the use of inclusive language.

... that people of color be included in committees selecting speakers and developing panels. However, the responsibility for including people of color in this conference should not be left with one or two people from that group. We further recommend that organizers publicize the conference in national and local African American lesbian and gay publications in the form of paid advertising.

... that moderators be trained to have a broad enough understanding of their topics so that they can facilitate a discussion that integrates diverse perspectives, and that multicultural training be a part of the planning process.

... that conference organizers improve information and clarify criteria for available scholarships and develop a clear policy for determination of recipients.

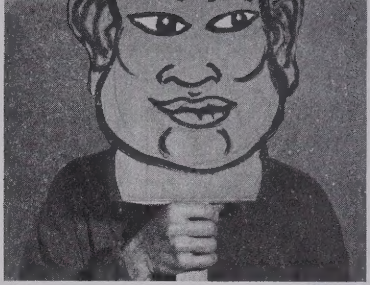
... also that the goals of the conference be clearly stated with regard to issues of inclusiveness. Such a statement ought to prevent some of the problems that have plagued this conference.

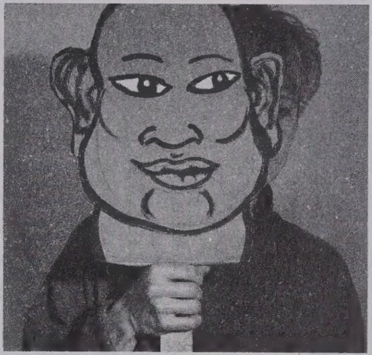
the statement issued after the conference by an Ad-Hoc Caucus of Lesbians and Gays of African Descent. "What he failed to acknowledge, and what we recognize, is that he occupies a position of privilege.... We recognize that positions of privilege and power among us [gays and lesbians] have been hard won, but it is inappropriate for white gay male authors, editors, and publishers to fail to acknowledge the multicultural, multi-ethnic tenor of the times." The caucus statement goes on to raise concerns about the inclusion of persons of color at the conference, but it is clear that Albee symbolized what many view as a growing backlash against the ideals of multiculturalism. It is a sharply divisive and growing debate that at its heart deals with diversity and our differing perceptions of the world. In practice, it also deals with issues of discrimination, power, and control.

As a research editor and fact-checker at a national magazine, I frequently deal with the way that issues are represented in the press. I've learned to consume media with very critical and wary eyes, because on the job I'm a sort of watchdog patrolling somewhere between the borders of accuracy and truth. I understand how authors and editors can inadvertently—and sometimes deliberately—twist subjects and their representation while throwing up a facade of objective journalism. As a "mainstream" journalist who is also Black, lesbian, and feminist, I have watched the developing debate about multiculturalism in the mainstream press with special interest. Much to my surprise, it is—for the most part—being frantically discussed as something very new, something very radical, and something very ominous, on about the same level as McCarthyism. Multiculturalism, the glossy press tells us, is a new movement whose agenda is shared by people of color, gays, and feminists. The main battlefield of this conflict has been in academia, but the press subtly warns that much more is at stake. Most of the articles in the print media (*Newsweek, The New Republic, New York Magazine, Atlantic Monthly,* and others) have grouped affirmative action hiring; financial aid and admissions policies; restrictions aimed at curbing hate speech; and efforts to increase ethnic, gender, and gay and lesbian studies as part of the multiculturalist's agenda. Surprisingly few of the articles have presented a balanced examination of the controversy; instead most have opted for one-sided analysis, highlighted by negative and inflammatory criticism.

First came *Newsweek*'s cover story of December 24, 1990, which labeled supporters of multiculturalism "Thought Police" and opponents as "a beleaguered minority among barbarians who would ban Shakespeare because he didn't write in Swahili." The snowball of criticism kept rolling, becoming more and more vitriolic and one-sided as the months went on. Every day I seemed to be clipping and copying another lengthy article written by a well-heeled academic or journalist who would take each layer of multiculturalism and peel, no, rip it apart, letter by letter. I felt overwhelmed by the complexity of some of the arguments and frustrated by everything I read. I was even more frustrated by what I wasn't reading. Where were the words that I expected to be hearing that would make rational sense out of all of this hysteria? Why were the print media presenting so much point without counterpoint? Somehow I felt wounded by what I was seeing around me, but I was having difficulty putting my finger exactly on what was missing and on what I was finding so emotionally upsetting about these convoluted diatribes. I just kept clipping and copying and trying to find the words that spoke to what I was feeling.

As the debate in the press increased, so did discussion among the writers and journalists that I know. Most of these conversa-





tions were friendly enough, but I often found myself to be the only person of color in the discussion. I just couldn't seem to find the right vocabulary to express my views, and I continued to feel frustrated and inarticulate. Cool, detached analysis was often staring my emotional upheaval in the face. There seemed to be an underlying message in the discussions: "If you can't argue and win points in the debate-team way that we've structured, then your point doesn't deserve consideration." On many evenings I would come home with a knot in my stomach and between my eyebrows. I would try to make sense out of things by spewing my frustration into the computer:

> I sit here, trying to think of the perfect words to make the perfect argument to convince these journalists, 99 percent of whom are white, that we should counter these one-sided "debates" on multiculturalism, which are masquerading as journalism. I realize more than ever how differently we all view the world. As a Black lesbian feminist, I know what it is like to be the other. To be the one who is trying to figure out who I am, not who I'm told I should be. My views are radically different from those represented in the mainstream press. To my mind, multiculturalism isn't a platform, or theory, or educational or political agenda. It's a simple, realistic definition of what the world is. The world is multicultural.

A few weeks later, I discuss President Bush's University of Michigan commencement speech criticizing political correctness with a young white male intern in my department. He is fresh out of a college and ready to jump head first into the journalism pool. "It's wrong to punish someone for saying what they think. It's against the constitution. It's censorship of free speech," he says about punitive retribution for students who don't abide by university codes of correct student behavior. I argue that there has to be some way of raising consciousness about offensive public slurs, racist, sexist, homophobic, and otherwise, but he is not swayed. "I think that if you let all of these kinds of remarks just come out then everything will die down in a while and it won't be a big deal anymore." I argue that these kinds of remarks have "just been coming out" for centuries and don't seem to be dying down at all. He continues."When I was in college, I was worried about this kind of thing all the time. Whenever I saw a Black person I'd think, oh, will they think I'm a racist? I don't know," he says wistfully. "I liked it better when I was in seventh grade and I didn't have to think about things like that." I think to myself, "Right! Get a clue! It's time to wake up to my reality. When I was in the seventh grade I was one of two blacks in a class of about thirty. The white girls in the class teased and taunted me for months about everything from my kinky hair to my short socks. Discrimination and racism are right in the face of minorities all of the time." Our discussion seems to go nowhere fast.

I appreciate my intern's concerns and understand that the multicultural debate provokes intense emotions on all sides. But women and people of color seem to have already developed our understanding of discrimination and prejudice while most white men are just beginning to get a taste of it. The idea of being judged, or of losing a job or a place in a freshman college class because of being white, or being a man, makes a lot of white people nervous and angry, and the media wastes no time in discussing that nervous anger.

The mainstream press has been serving up one-sided analysis, which is really very naive. Gee, we think that Western Civilization has come up with the the best and most important ideas in history and hey, we think that Shakespeare is a more important writer than Alice Walker. But those multiculturalists want preferential treatment, and they want to censor us from being able to call someone a faggot or a nigger or a bulldyke. As *Newsweek*'s article said, "It would not be enough for a student to refrain from insulting homosexuals or other minorities. He or she would be expected to 'affirm' their presence on campus and to study their literature and culture alongside that of Plato, Shakespeare and Locke." (Ironically, at least two of these authors were no strangers to the joys of homosexual interaction.) Those arguing against multiculturalism spoke only in terms of their loss of power and freedom.

While fact-checking an article that dealt directly with the issue of campus diversity, I found some of the missing words I had been looking for. The Diversity Project at the University of California at Berkeley produced a report in June 1990 that contains conclusions based on months of interviews with hundreds of Berkeley students of all races and both genders. Because of its progressive approach to issues of diversity on campus, Berkeley is one of the universities caught in the center of the storm of multiculturalism in academia. Interestingly enough, the report finds that campus diversity, and especially affirmative action, are subjects that are troubling and confusing for *all* Berkeley students. "The University needs to create an effective way to communicate to students that American society is stratified along racial, as well as class and gender lines. Where one is located in that system of stratification is critical in determining one's chances for access to social resources like a public university." It was refreshing to see in such plain English something the press wasn't even acknowledging—the reason why all this discussion of minority inclusion had come about in the first place. The media was ignoring any impact of the history and consequences of minority and class oppression in this country, perpetuating the ever-present myth of America. Discussion of multiculturalism threatens the myth of America, which tells us that we are a classless, oppression-free society, with liberty and justice for all. With such a powerful fable in place, it is difficult to acknowledge, let alone discuss, why minorities remain in the lower part of the class structure.

It is clear from the statements by Edward Albee and the critics of multiculturalism that there is a desire to believe that this oppression is a thing of the past. Slavery, segregation, genocide, persecution of gays and women, systemic exclusion of minorities from education and history, and the fallout created by these societal bombshells, are not acknowledged as relevant to today's situation. As Albee, *Newsweek*, and those who embrace Dinesh D'Souza and Shelby Steele would say: we heard it all during the civil rights movements of the sixties. And we took care of all of those problems, right? So what are you still complaining about? Tighten your belts and get over your victimization.

At OutWrite '91 the tension—between those who think it's all behind us and those who don't, between those who were offended by some of Albee's comments and those who didn't see what the fuss was about—was at the center of discussion throughout the gathering.

"I think that political correctness is probably the biggest threat to the full expression of the vibrancy of ideas in the gay community," a thirtyish white man addresses me during my stint as a panelist. He lived in China and studied the language for many years, but was not allowed to write about the subject at his paper in San Diego. "I'm not allowed to write about Asians because I'm not Asian. They have a very South African policy which says the Black will write about the Blacks and the Asian will write about the Asians." He echoes Albee's comments about writing about other cultures. "May I not write about Blacks?" Albee said, "May I not write about women? The responsibility of a writer and the ability of a writer is to be able to be just about anything that he is capable of imagining."

Albee criticizes Blacks for retreating to separatism when others (whites?) "would have been quite happy to let the entire issue drop." It's hard to believe that a writer of his age and experience could be so cavalier and misguided about minority oppression, and so out of touch with our reality. The often suffocating influence of the dominant culture is something that those within that culture can obviously take for granted. Women, gays, Blacks, and other people of color in this country have just begun to understand who they are on their own terms and have started to shape their own identities. Many have done so by separating themselves from the deafening influences of mainstream culture and their voices are beginning to sing. But is that enough? How do minorities continue to raise awareness about the ways in which they are oppressed? How do we balance the privilege that some have enjoyed with the lack of opportunity experienced by others?

It is important for everyone, including writers, to try and understand the experience of cultures other than our own and, ideally, writers should be able to write about whatever subjects they are interested in. But a male writer will never fully experience being a woman in the way that a woman does. Same goes for a white writer writing about other races, or straight writers writing about gays. There will always be things about the experience of being from a certain group or culture that only those within that group can fully articulate. Alternative voices coming from within disenfranchised cultures need to be supported, nurtured, widely promoted, and valued for their own uniqueness. There are stories that only they can tell, no matter how much someone from outside that culture studies it or becomes an "expert" on it. That doesn't mean those are better stories, or that those stories must be told to the total exclusion of others. Balance of perspectives is vitally important, and since most mainstream editorial content is still controlled and shaped by straight white men the scales may have to be tipped or even pushed to even things out.

Speakers like Albee who bring up controversial and painful issues should not be censored or have their comments screened. His candor about his viewpoints helps us to understand the incredible difference in perspectives within the gay community. But Edward Albee seemed to come to OutWrite '91 with fear of a multicultural planet and ghettoization on his mind. His eyes could only focus on "misguided" writers who he thinks are in danger of being strait-jacketed by their gayness.

I came to OutWrite and saw an incredibly diverse group of writers with little in common besides their gayness. I imagined that many participants came as I did, to escape the straight-jacket of the dominant culture and to help fine-tune their own unique voices.

Albee says that "the responsibility [of the writer] is to try to persuade the people who pay attention to him to become different people, to change, to hold a mirror up to all society and say look, this is who you are, this is how you're behaving. Why don't you stop it.... " I like his idea. I don't claim to understand what it fully is to be a white man, or to speak for all Blacks or all women. But here is the truth that my writer's imagination sees when I look at the arguments against multiculturalism—without pulling punches: Many white men in power are scared. They are beginning to understand at first hand how discrimination works. They are feeling squeezed, bitter, and resentful. They thought they knew what racism and sexism were about—now they're having to rethink everything, and they are resistant. Albee says that "the responsibility of the recipient [of writing]... is to be willing to have that mirror held up and to look at it clearly, and to be willing to change.... "

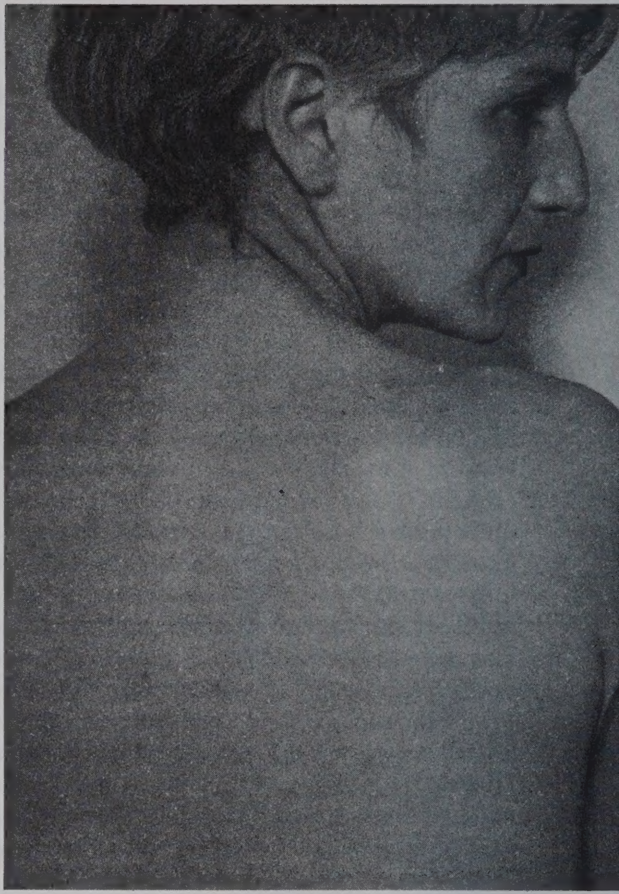
Gaze into the looking glass, Mr. Albee.

because, of the last five conferences that I've been integrally involved in, OutWrite '90 and '91 have been the least "multicultural" and (no surprise) the most problematic. On second reflection, perhaps this is ironic on a different level—"multicultural" is usually a buzzword denoting white folks plus some others who aren't solely Black. The other three conferences were "women of color" conferences and did not involve white people; therefore (more irony) they're not usually categorized as "multicultural" though they were produced by a coalition of African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latina women. Similarly, discussions of "interracial" relationships are almost always framed in terms of black and white, white and "other." White is the given with which we work. Because my discussion is rooted in the OutWrite conferences in which I was too often the only "other," I'm stuck in this framework even as I try to break out of the binary oppositions.

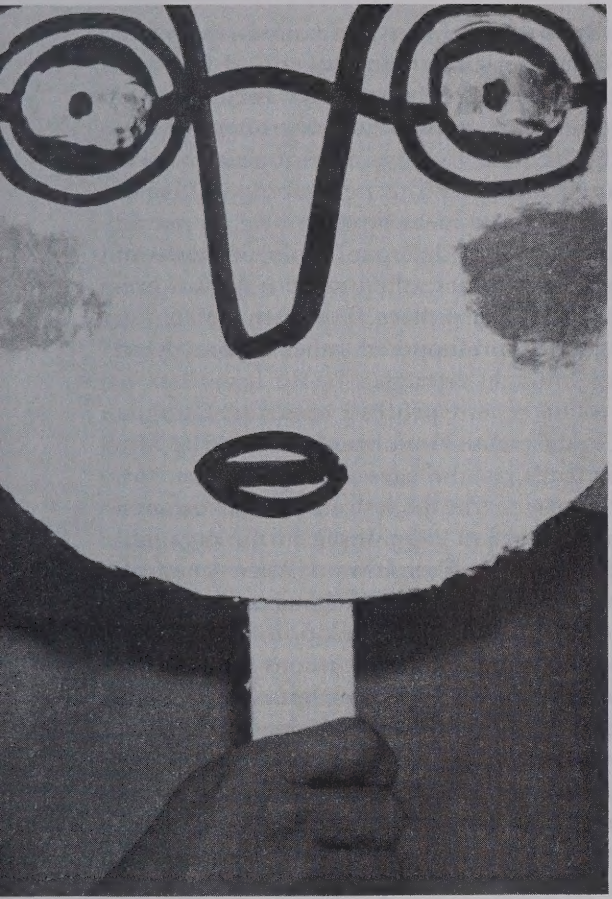
In conference organizing, as in life, no one is completely innocent. It does not follow, however, that we are therefore all equally guilty. There is no such thing as a completely successful conference. Limited resources, imperfect planning, and inflated expectations of participants ensure that something always goes wrong; critical issues are always excluded, glossed over, or forgotten; someone is always pissed off. Some organizers take this simple reality as a license to not deal with issues of inclusiveness in any substantive way; since we can't do or be everything, why worry?

TRUE STORY #1

Tuesday night before a Saturday "Empowering Women of Color" conference, I get a frantic phone call from veteran organizer L. "Do we have sign language interpreters?" she demands, "Someone just called to ask and I told them yes, because we always have." Horrified, I check my list of tasks and over- and underlapping committees—"No, we don't." I spend nine hours the next day and night calling around for interpreters. Most are kind enough not to laugh in my face; they provide me with further numbers to call. Finally I get two women to agree to work at such short notice and for such lousy pay. No deaf women show up on Saturday; it turns out that a hearing ASL student made the original inquiry. One reason no deaf women show up is that the advertising committee did not include the information that interpreters were available.



What is instructive about this story is not its end result, which was the exclusion of deaf women from the conference, but the committee's response to the situation. There was no debate about the necessity of getting interpreters; that was a given, inher-



ited from years of progressive feminist organizing. When no deaf women showed up, the response was not "Why did we waste all that money?" or "See, they are not interested in coming to this, anyway," but was instead an acknowledgment that we had fucked up in a way that could and would be changed.

Organizing with women of color who have progressive ideals and work experience eliminates an entire ground level of debate and discussion. The importance of racial and class diversity and widespread accessibility does not have to be reinvented and rediscovered at every turn. I had so internalized these norms through years spent immersed in feminist and Ethnic Studies circles where women of color were the center, that I forgot how to be "other" in the ways I was forced to be as the only woman of color organizing OutWrite. I forgot our primary lesson, "never be the only one," because for so long I'd had the luxury of being one of many. I'm not idealizing the organizing of women of color; it's rife with conflict, exclusion, and difficulty. But the ground rules for organizing a "women's event" versus one that is mixed or male, a "people of color" event versus one that is "multicultural/predominantly white," are very different. The legacy of the last twenty years of progressive feminist and anti-racist organizing has taught at least some women a few things.

Some claim, accurately, that what's been taught is predominantly lip service to an ideal of inclusiveness. I completely agree, but would like to point out that lip service is at least the entering wedge for action and change. Notice that in the increasingly reactionary war zone that is the US in the 1990s, it's lip service that is provoking hysterical attack from the Right. We are fighting over the right to define reality, the right to define what "normal" rights, assumptions, and expectations are.

TRUE STORY #2

At OutWrite '90, organizational chaos reigns behind the scenes. At the last minute, I discover that several of the people on a panel dealing with race and writing are convinced that someone else is organizing the panel. This leads to a bizarre assortment of panelists—four Black, one Latino, three men, two women. There is no "balance" of what I like to call the four food groups of US racial discourse: "African Americans," "Asian Americans," "Native Americans," and "Latinos." I throw up my hands and rewrite the panel blurb to reflect this: "Black and Latino writers and activists discuss...." At the end of the panel, a young Asian man in the audience stands up to decry the lack of Asian representation.

This was another moment of multiple ironies for me, because of course I agreed with his point. I also wondered where he had been during the hellish organizing process. I also knew that if we'd had even one

Asian panelist, we would have been "safe" from this criticism in a way that would have completely avoided the actual issue of "representation." For example, in what way does a third-generation Japanese-American man represent a Korean woman, a Vietnamese man, a newly arrived Taiwanese immigrant? And that's only asking the question on the grounds of race, omitting the entire matrix of gender, class, disability, sexual status, et al., that forms self-identification. Racial categorization in this country jams incredibly diverse peoples into four categories, and if you don't fit—tough shit. Worse, the four categories are the "progressive" version of reality; check out how many times race is discussed as a black and white proposition, literally and figuratively. If I hear the phrase "everybody—black and white" or "women and minorities" one more time, I plan to either murder someone or throw myself, shrieking, off the Bay Bridge.

The complexity of the issues is not an excuse to throw up our hands and abandon the attempt to be representative of at least some of the infinite differences within any grouping; it's to remind us that, as always, the story is more complicated than it appears. "Multiculturalism" is an ideology; the many wildly various cultures of this country produced through and around class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, location, and ideology are lived realities with lengthy histories only now beginning to be widely acknowledged and explored. "Multicultural organizing" at its most limited is the liberal ideal of "cultural pluralism," the idea that we just provide a space for all kinds of people, all kinds of ideas on an equal basis, a "level playing field." There's nothing absolutely wrong with this, per se, but it does beg several questions. First, who's doing the organizing; who gets to choose which different ideas get represented? The first two years of OutWrite suffered badly from the racial homogeneity of the organizing committee, which affected everything from which issues and writers were seen as important, to the skeptical response from invited writers of color who had entirely too much past experience being tokenized in other predominantly white settings. Second, a call to dialogue is important, but often ignores the fact that the dynamics of gender, race, and class skew the perceived validity of speakers and ideas by others; we do not all come to the "dialogue" from positions of equality. In fact, often we're not even present in the first place. Too often a common agenda is presupposed rather than analyzed and thought through.

The recent protests over the Lambda Legal Defense Fund benefit showing of *Miss Saigon* is just the latest example of how this can play out in the lesbian and gay communities. Lack of Asian input in the organization *and* lack of sensitivity to Asian American issues by the non-Asian organizers combined to produce a public relations fiasco with ongoing negative repercussions for coalition building. On a different but related level, Edward Albee's remarks during the keynote speeches at OutWrite '91 fulfilled perfectly the purpose for which some conference organizers wanted him as a keynote speaker in the first place—"name" and publicity value. The value of predominantly negative publicity is open to question, though it is true that Albee got OutWrite mentioned in places it would have otherwise been ignored. The price, however, was the anger and pain of the audience members who felt trivialized and erased by his ignorance and ultimate dismissal of everything from the Civil Rights movement to the concept of a lesbian and gay community and literary movement. Others found his remarks valuable because they provoked a public discussion of the issues involved. Still others were outraged that anyone thought the terms of the discussion were new or different rather than merely appearing in an unexpected context.

The Albee controversy highlighted an ongoing tension in the organizing of the OutWrite conferences—the difference between organizing a "liberal" and a "progressive" event. A progressive agenda has a goal of working toward liberation on a number of levels; the framework of progressive events is oriented toward coalition building. Liberalism merely attempts to provide some space for people to be "different" without undermining the hierarchy of power that produces and stigmatizes those differences in the first place. I want to make it very clear that I'm not setting up a good/bad dichotomy here; a progressive agenda does not always produce progressive results, and many events I would characterize as liberal offer important space for marginalized voices. In this sense, I believe that OutWrite has been and should continue to be an important resource for many different writers whose voices have not been widely heard; the ideology of cultural pluralism at least acknowledges that there are other voices to be heard.

The deal is that racism and sexism are not something we made up to bash guilty white guys with; they are real, lived phenomena that operate through institutions and people to do serious everyday damage. In this context, it becomes slightly ludicrous to ask why the dominant group (whatever it is in any given situation) hasn't provided for us. They ain't gonna without a struggle; that's the nature of the beast. The point is not the justice of our claims and criticisms; we've always had the moral high ground and a fat lot of good it's done us. Precisely because we are so often victimized, we need to be very wary of becoming "victims." We need to take very seriously Bernice Johnson Reagon's advice to think like guerilla soldiers, decide in which fights to engage, plan for the long run. Participating and not participating in "people of color," single race, or white-dominated organizations and events are all valid choices; they just need to be strategized in order to create real personal and political change.

My opinion of "multiculturalism" is the same as Gandhi's apocryphal opinion of "Western Civilization"; I think it would be a good idea.

Special cut-out supplement for white folks:
Some possible answers to the question "Why aren't there more people of color involved in X?"

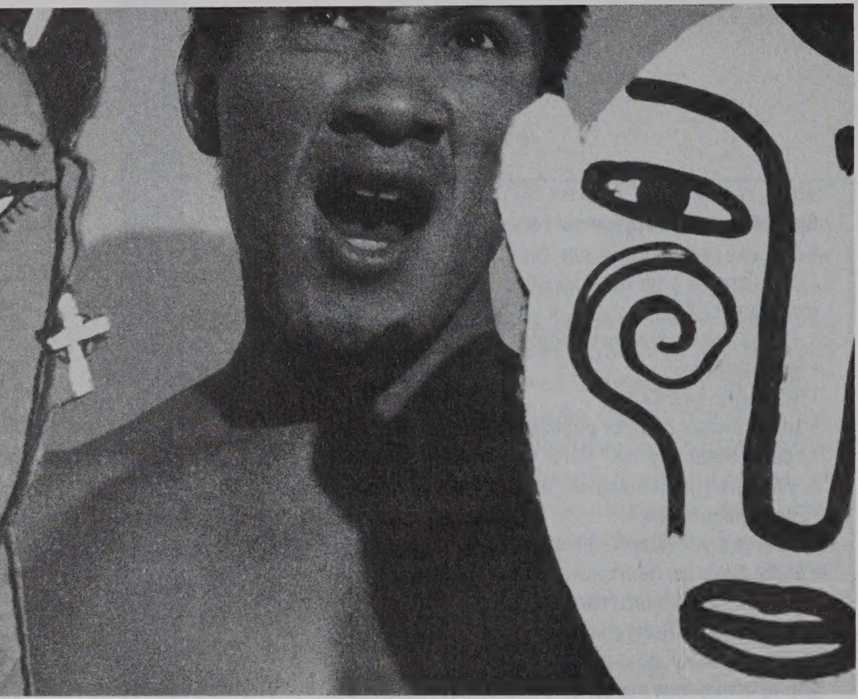
1. Did you ask anybody through:
   - organizations
   - friendship circles
   - ads in people of color publications
   - open community call? Refer to question 4.
2. Who are you defining as "people of color"?
   - Black people only?
   - Have you considered the existence of Arab, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Latino, Native American, and Asian American groups and organizations? Refer to question 4.
3. Are you only asking the question because you're afraid that people of color are going to jam you up for not including them? Do you feel any genuine lack in your event or organization or are you just trying to look good? Refer to question 4.
4. Did you decide at the last minute to color up an already determined agenda?

L.H.

Special cut-out supplement for colored folks:
Some possible answers to the question "Why aren't there more people of color involved in X?"

1. Did anyone ask you or your organization to get involved? If so, did you? If you didn't, did you spread the word among other folks with more time, energy, tolerance, or whatever prevented you from participating?
If you weren't asked directly but knew about the project, what stopped you from getting involved?
2. When you use the term "people of color," are you only talking about your particular racial group? Do you advocate the inclusion of other people of color and the issues they have that differ from yours?
3. Do your criticisms of events or organizations go beyond simple attack? Do you operate from a position of "innocence"?
4. Do you completely withdraw from negative situations and assume that your only possible agenda is all or nothing?

L.H.



ARGUING IN PUBLIC continued

the word: the obvious one of political delegation or the role of acting as a spokesperson for a particular community, and the second one of symbolic content in various cultural forms—that is, how particular social groups are portrayed in fiction, movies, or television. Both senses are clearly related by the act of communicating something from or about a particular group to the larger society.

These representational issues surface in a number of different contexts. They range from concern about the effects of "political correctness," the composition of panels at conferences, college curriculums and what "great books" are included in the canon, verbal expressions of hate on college campuses, stereotypes and defamation in public media. They are symptomatic of the political tensions generated by a politics that stresses strong collective identities in a society that is made up of an enormous array of culturally diverse, politicized communities that are not accepted as legitimate by the dominant political or cultural instititions.

The planning for the second national lesbian and gay writers conference, OutWrite '91, routinely raised questions about both types of representation. Any desire to recognize the historical contributions of pioneering lesbian and gay authors (the majority of whom were white men) sometimes clashed with the explicit commitment to recognize the contributions of contemporary writers from communities of color, or who represent previously marginalized experiences.

Planning a conference that aspires to adequately represent the real and complex diversity of the lesbian and gay communities is quite legitimately an endless process of negotiation. Because there are so many different and conflicting perspectives, this process will inevitably fall short of the most inclusive realization of representation. Among the many communities that the planning committee of OutWrite '91 sought to have represented were ethnic and racial communities like Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans; sexual minorities such as bisexuals, transsexuals, the S/M community; people with AIDS; and lesbian and gay writers from Latin America and Canada. Some communities were represented by specific panels while others were represented on a number of different panels. Unfortunately, we did not always succeed in providing for adequate representation of every perspective or community. For example, our commitment to the principle of representation of people of color on all panels raised inter-

MAKING DIALOGUE POSSIBLE

No vision of a multicultural society is viable without a commitment to dialogue—candid and engaged, risky and painful, but hopefully, thoughtful and fair. Fostering dialogue is not a luxury or mere personal option; it is the form of political responsibility.

My experience at *OUT/LOOK* and on the OutWrite planning committees has suggested ways that I think would help us create some of the social and personal conditions for dialogue while working to establish intermediary institutions in a multicultural public sphere. The emotional intensity and bitterness of many debates involving multiculturalism raises questions of vulnerability—emotional, cultural, and political. Those who are participating in the debate become vulnerable either to the pain of exclusion, or, in giving up privileges and power (by men or white people), the pain of losing emotionally significant forms of expression. This social and psychological vulnerability underlies the fear of public debate on the shape of multicultural society. Much of the reaction to "political correctness" stems from the pain experienced by people on all sides of the question.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE IS THE FIRST STEP IN SHARING PUBLIC LIFE. Public discussion of politically tense questions is politically risky and personally frightening. Yet public discussion offers a form of social objectivity and makes the participants accountable to the communities engaged.

NONE OF US IS IMMUTABLE. One risk of dialogue is that we learn something new about ourselves and others. Every participant enters the public arena with differing degrees of power and privilege. Those who come from communities that are represented in mainstream public life or who have traditionally had greater access to political and cultural institutions are obligated to enter into dialogue by treating other perspectives as equal. But once dialogue starts, we are potentially open to change.

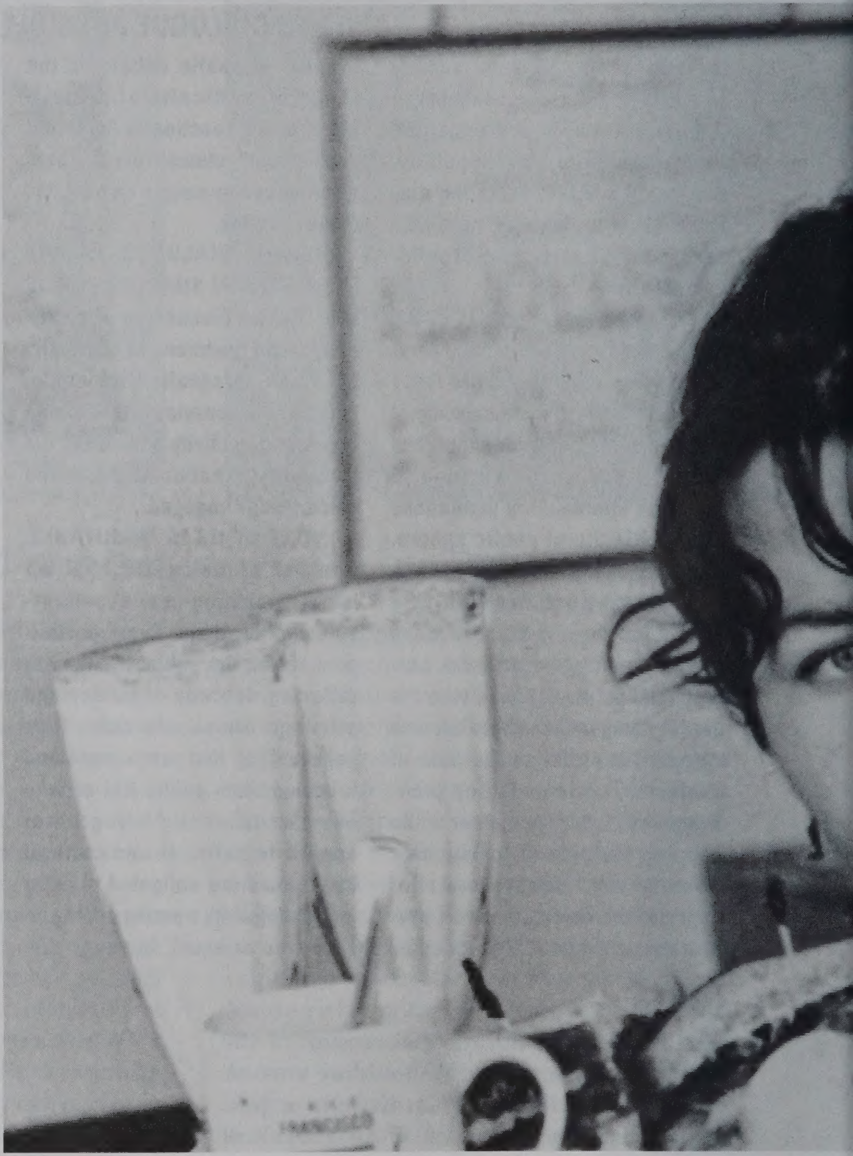
THERE IS NO UNIVERSAL POSITION. ALL DIALOGUE INVOLVES INTERPRETATION. We might even say all dialogue involves "misinterpretation" that, while unavoidable, should not be taken lightly. Such a situation creates an important role for theory, systematically examining our assumptions, framing questions, and learning what we don't know. Everything is always open to criticism; no power, no privilege is unexamined.

STOICISM TOWARDS PAIN IS NECESSARY IN PUBLIC DEBATE. No one enjoys being humiliated in public (not in a political context, in any case). Participation in public dialogue will not be fruitful if we do not learn to accept pain and hurt feelings. We should expect the expression of anger and hostility. There is no closure. No debate or political discussion is ever final. There will be no end to debate. The question will always be reopened. *J.E.*

esting questions during a discussion of the panel on Jewish writing—should we encourage the presence of Sephardic Jews or Jews from third world countries? As a result of the conference and similiar discussions many people (and I think particularly white people), realized that as Louise Sloan wrote in San Francisco's *Bay Guardian,* "One thing that became very clear...is that speaking for anyone else or claiming any community as absolutely one's own are highly problematic, if not impossible, undertakings." Also, as that realization implies, the presumption that there is a "universal" point of view above the multicultural diversity of perspectives is untenable.

While representation in the form of speakers, political delegates, cultural figures, or role models is a structural requirement of the new "multicultural" public sphere, the *adequacy* of representation in cultural forms is also a contested issue. The use of stereotypes, adverse narrative conventions (such as the homosexual who dies at the end), and value-laden metaphors ("innocent victims" for people who were infected with HIV from blood transfusions rather than sexual activity or IV drug use), raise fundamental questions about the adequacy of representation of minority or social groups in movies, novels, histories, and other cultural forms.

Waiting



Jackie could be on the phone digging up dirt for an investigative report on a homophobic Congressman.

Bob could be at his drawing board, putting the finishing touches on a new lesbian superhero.

It's never easy to make a living as a writer or artist, but for lesbians and gays it's almost impossible.

Since mainstream publications avoid gay material and gay publications don't pay very much, lesbian and gay artists and writers usually have to subsidize their own work. Today, increasing censorship and homophobia make it essential that we take the responsibility to allow our writers and artists to explore, document, and express our history and culture.

In 1989, OUT/LOOK established our Writers & Artists Fund to recognize and support the emerging voices in our community. For the last two years this fund has allowed us to offer minimal compensation to writers and artists whose work is published in OUT/LOOK. This year we have renewed our commitment and have more than tripled our goal.

We're not suggesting Bob and Jackie give up their day jobs yet, but until then (*and with your help*) we can buy them some time.

to Write

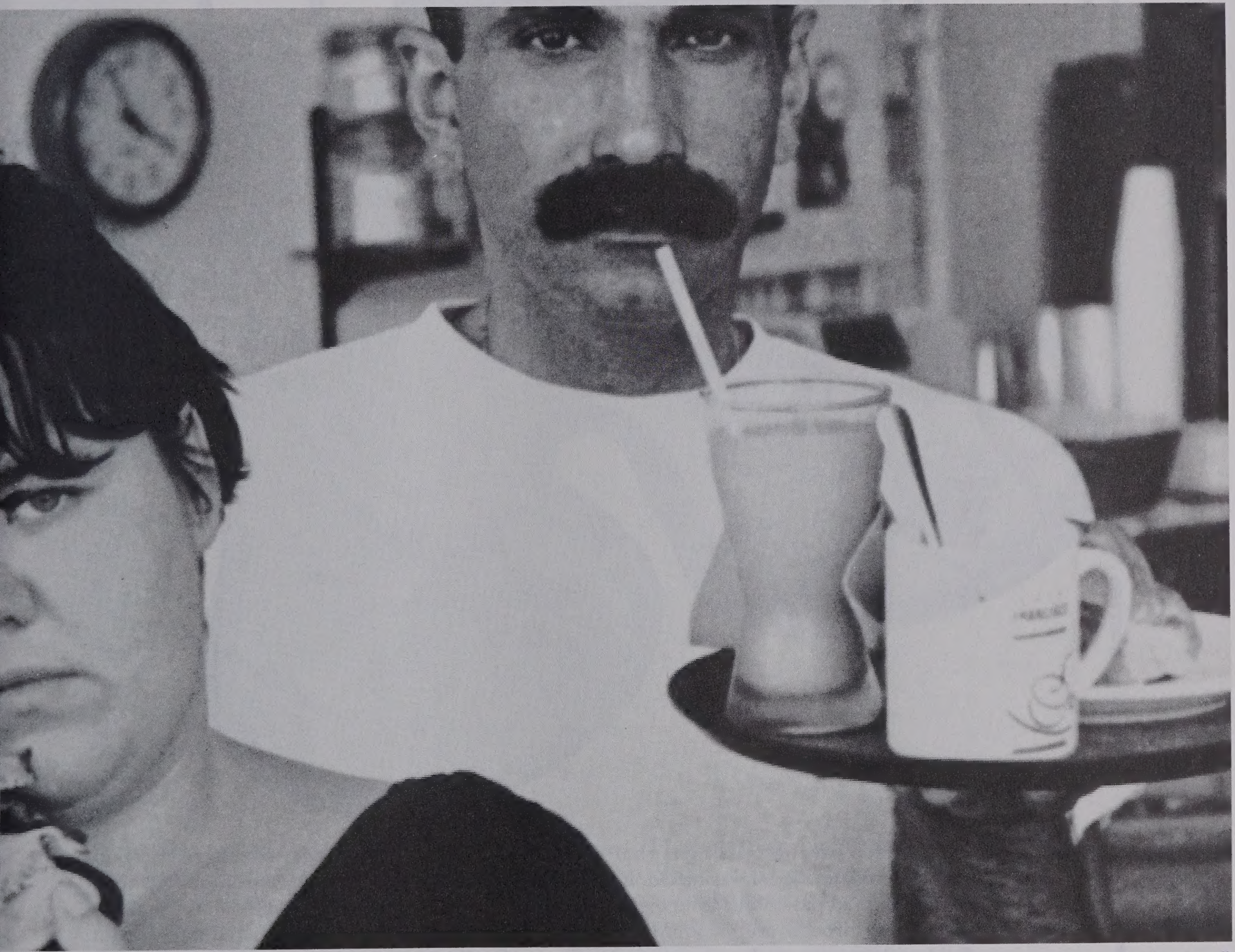


photo credit: Blake Sorrell

YES I'LL SUPPORT THE OUT/LOOK WRITERS & ARTISTS FUND

__Enclosed is my donation to support the Fund
__Please send me more information about the Fund

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SUPPORT LESBIAN AND
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WHO WILL?

Please make checks payable to the W/A Fund OUT/LOOK Foundation
All donations to the Writers & Artists Fund are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.
Mail to: OUT/LOOK 2940 16th Street, Suite 319, San Francisco, CA 94103 Telephone 415-626-7929

Personality fabulosa

Monica Palacios

Photography by Phyllis Christopher

I fell asleep on the classifieds that were spread across my bed. I was naked. Kinky? I wish. No, I had passed out from eight hours of looking through every roommate ad in the Los Angeles area. It was already the fifteenth and I had to find a place by the end of the month. My adorable apartment was going to become someone's parking space—I hate progress. What knocked me out was the last ad I read: "...2 holistic, vegetarian, non-smoking, non-existing lesbians, are looking for a 3rd lesbian to share a communal, collective, clairvoyant household. Call Yin or Yang between sunrise and sunset. Cats ok—we have 57." No thanks, ladies. I'll go live on a Greyhound Bus.

The phone rang. As I dragged my butt out of bed, I noticed newsprint on my belly. Great. I'll probably get skin cancer and die in two years. If I was lucky, maybe my death would come sooner, solving my moving dilemma. I answered the phone on the fourth ring. "Hello," I said as if I cared.

"Hi, my name is Alicia." She pronounced her name in perfect Spanish—which I loved. She continued. "I came across your roommate ad at Santa Monica College. I think we should meet."

"You don't have cats, right?" I asked.

"Nope. No pets. Not even ants."

I prepared for the bonus question, "You are a lesbian?"

CLASSIFIEDS

Alicia paused for a second. "Well, the last time I checked, everything was 100% lezbo. No penis envy here."

"Very funny, Alicia," I said, feeling a little self-conscious saying her name in Spanish. I mean—I had no choice, it was how she pronounced it. And anyway, I can speak Spanish—not fluently, but I feel pretty damn proud when I order food at Taco Bell. I proceeded with my lesbian investigation as the theme song from Dragnet played in my head. "I don't mean to ask such a stupid question but people are so desperate to find roommates—they'll lie! And then I have to send a man wearing a fedora and a trench coat after them." She laughed. I was pleased. "I hope I'm not sounding pushy."

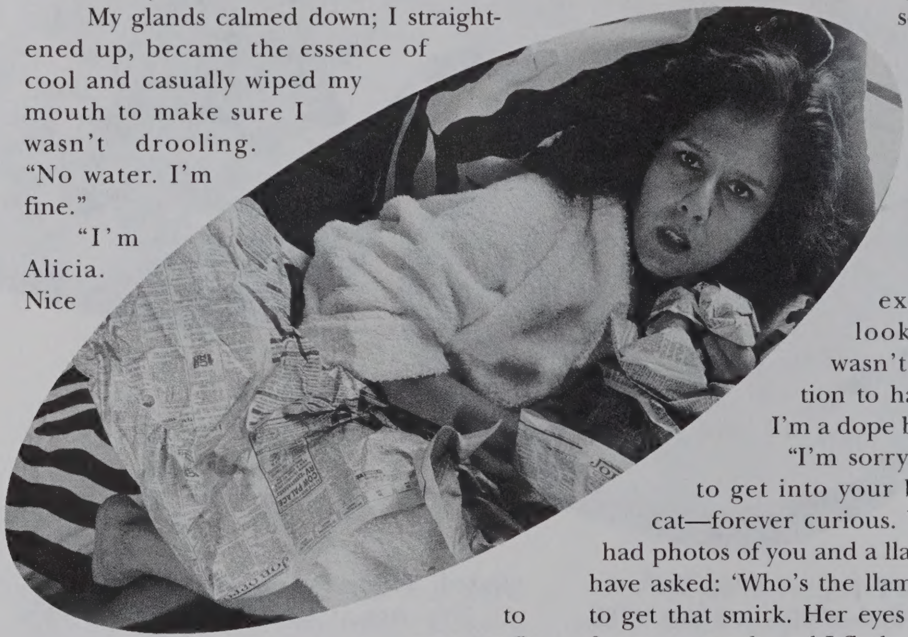
"No, not at all. I enjoy women who don't beat around the bush." The smoothness of her voice was like a bite of a San Franciscan mint—cool and sweet. "How about seven? Oh, and ah, I live in Santa Monica, two blocks away from the beach."

She gave me her address and I threw in that I was an aspiring writer, trying to create that million-dollar screenplay, play, grocery list—anything really. But I assured her I had a steady paying gig, working for several catering companies. We said good-bye and I thought: strong woman, fresh voice, beach pad—cool.

The address led me to a quaint courtyard filled with luscious roses and three cottage-type houses surrounding the garden. The center house had the number I was looking for, so I followed the round steps that made me walk funny to the door. Right before my middle finger made its way to the doorbell, the door opened. She was Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*. She was a gorgeous Latina. She took my breath away—I choked.

"Do you need water?" Her question ended with a soft smile—no, a smirk—and I loved it. Alicia placed her hand on my shoulder. Ay caramba! Oh god, she's making my loins hot and she's a potential roommate? Scary.

My glands calmed down; I straightened up, became the essence of cool and casually wiped my mouth to make sure I wasn't drooling. "No water. I'm fine."



"I'm Alicia. Nice to meet you." She gave me a strong shake, looking at me with her beautiful, sparkling hazel eyes.

I sucked in some air and quickly looked around the room. "Great place. Do you have any dental floss?" I knew it sounded weird, but there was something stuck in between my back teeth and I was giving Alicia a chance to come to my aid. Oh, baby, take my temperature!

Alicia laughed. "You walk in here choking and now you need dental floss. Is this a test?" Again, flashing me that adorable smirk.

She led me into the bathroom and told me the dental floss was in the medicine cabinet. I noticed a picture on the wall to my left of Alicia kissing a woman on the cheek while wrapped in her arms. Friend—I thought. You can kiss and hug your friends. No big deal. What am I doing? Floss, girl.

Heading for the living room, I noticed two more pictures of the "other woman" in the hallway. I had to know. I have one of those sick, curious minds. But there was a small part of me that didn't want to verbalize my tacky question so I managed to be playful about it as I asked in a gangster sort of way. "Who's the babe?"

"That's my ex-wife." She looked down. It wasn't the best question to have asked. God, I'm a dope brain.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get into your business. I'm a cat—forever curious. You could have had photos of you and a llama and I would have asked: 'Who's the llama?'" I managed to get that smirk. Her eyes sparkled at me for two seconds and I flashed her the peace sign.

"Let me show you the rest of the house," she said.

Alicia was the tour guide of the month, showing me the sites with her edible personality, her short black tank dress, her long wavy hair—you know, that wild Latin look—her healthy bronzed skin and her face—I wanted to bite into it. She wasn't a roommate. She was trouble. I couldn't live with a sex goddess! I'd want to hump her at all times. As she gave me the grand tour, I floated behind her, inhaling her existence. Every now and then I'd throw in some funny line but I was under her spell. Then I started to worry. Did she find me attractive? Is she considering me as a roommate? I hate when I get like this.

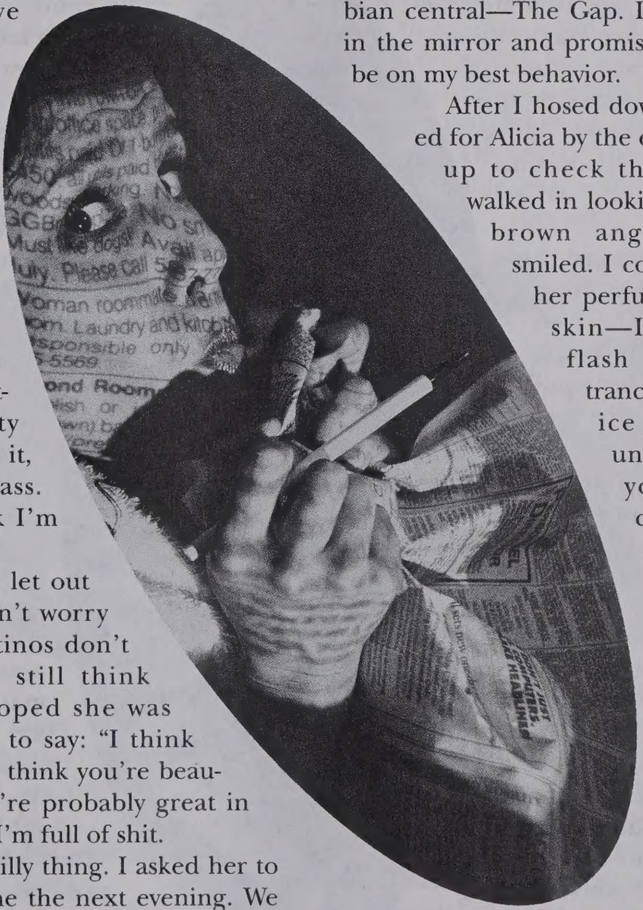
"Do you attend Santa Monica College, or do you hang out there to stare at young coeds?" She interrupted my insecure thoughts.

"Well if you must know, I have enrolled to take a Spanish class—conversational of course. I am not a beginner at my ancestral tongue. ¿Dónde está Pepe?—fajitas—for here or to go." Alicia cracked up. "Ok, I can't speak the language fluently and I'm pretty embarrassed about it, so I'm taking a class. But you still think I'm cool, right?"

This time she let out a good laugh. "Don't worry about it. Many Latinos don't speak Spanish. I still think you're cool." I hoped she was going to continue to say: "I think you're cute too ... I think you're beautiful ... I think you're probably great in the sack...." I think I'm full of shit.

Then I did a silly thing. I asked her to have dinner with me the next evening. We could find out more about each other and I could see if she would let me pick off her plate. She suggested a vegetarian Indian restaurant. (I wasn't surprised). I told her I was a vegetarian too. She laughed, and said "how very lesbian of us." But I was thinking more like, how very lesbian of me to disguise a dinner date as a casual business meeting.

I left her house feeling very mischievous and—oh, what's the word—horny! So I headed for the Santa Monica Pier, which was within walking distance, to escape into the arcades. A couple rounds of skee ball was better than a cold shower any day.



I arrived at the restaurant fifteen minutes early to freshen up. The restroom felt like a freezer as I removed my sweaty t-shirt to put on the white cotton shirt from lesbian central—The Gap. I looked at myself in the mirror and promised I was going to be on my best behavior.

After I hosed down, I sat and waited for Alicia by the entrance. I looked up to check the time and she walked in looking as radiant as a brown angel should. We smiled. I could already smell her perfume, her hair, her skin—I stood up in a flash to break the trance. "You must have ice cubes in your underwear because you look pretty cool. As cool as a cucumber." Yeah, I had a way with words that drove the women crazy.

She blushed and softly said, "I don't wear underwear."

"Well, maybe you have the cubes stashed somewhere else." I flashed her a smile and placed my hand on her bare shoulder. I refrained from having an orgasm because it wasn't the time or place. Alicia was wearing an off-white strapless summer dress that truly highlighted her Latina beauty. The dress was simple but she was so elegant in it. "Let's go get a table."

We sat down. I wanted to have an out-of-body experience so I could see how charming we looked. She let out: her day had been hectic and a glass of chardonnay was in order. Yeah, baby, loosen up. She was going on about work, not noticing I was metaphysically licking her face.

"So who gave you those beautiful eyes?"

"My father." Alicia took a small sip of wine.

"I'm assuming you're a Chicana." She nodded. "Me too. Well Mexican-American—Chicana—same thing. I like saying Chicana because it's political and it pisses people off." Alicia gave me her smirk as if to say: I'd like to discuss this with you some other time.

I quickly changed the subject. "So, what about those Dodgers?" Her smirk grew a little as she shook her head, stirred her wine with her index finger, then placed it in her mouth and sucked the wine off. I was surprised at her Ann-Margaret behavior, but I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Alicia looked at the floor and then slowly leaned into the table, resting her weight on her elbows, giving me her eyes. Wow. Her eyes were seductive pools of sweet lust. Were we making love? It sure felt like it.

"Ramona, I have something to tell you." Her voice gave me a chill and made my nipples erect. Good thing I was wearing my extra strength bra—absolutely pokeproof. After all that flirty stuff, was she going to deliver some bad news? No way. Oh, god, was she going to tell me she was really a man, trying to become a woman, trying to become a lesbian, trying to get a credit card and she needed a co-signer?! I mean, people have their rights but I wasn't about to be a co-signer! Here I was getting ready for her to lean over and give me a kiss—wait a minute. Her face was almost serious but the corners of her mouth were starting to curl.

"Alicia, are you messing with my head?"

"Yeah." She giggled. Very adorable. "You make me feel comfortable enough to play." Her hand covered mine.

"Do I make you feel comfortable enough so that you want to live with me?"

Her twinkling eyes looked away as her mouth tried to produce words but she ended up smiling at me. "Ramona, I don't know." She pulled her hand away and transformed it into a resting spot for her chin.

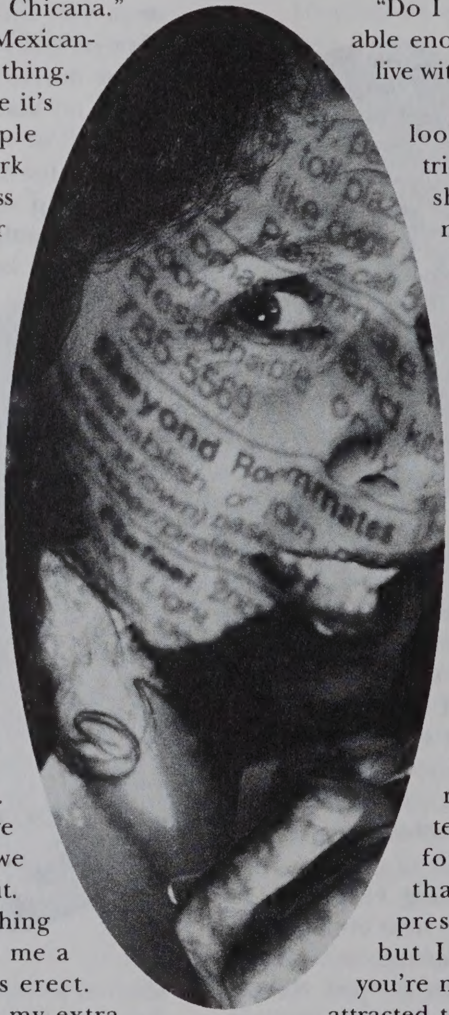
"You don't know if you feel comfortable or you don't know if you want to live with me?"

"Both."

Both?! My plan had failed. What's going on here? Alicia, you're supposed to want me as a roommate. Our living situation turns into this great romance. I win the lottery and we travel in comfortable cotton clothing that always looks neatly pressed! My head went on but I had to respond. "So you're not—I mean—you're not attracted to—not that a roommate should be—" I stopped talking because I didn't know how.

"Ramona, we need to walk over to Ben and Jerry's and share a big ol' ice cream sundae. This way we can figure out our roommate situation."

OK, I get what's happening here. She

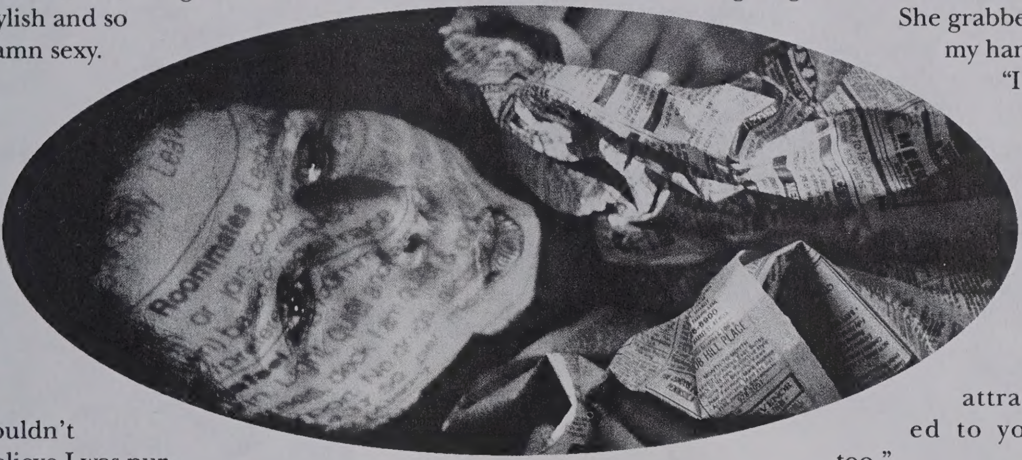


was attracted to me but she was doing that "young girl, I want to be in control," thing. She was only a year younger than me but that's all it takes. But I knew how to handle this filly: let her roam, continue to charm her, and she will happily trot into my corral.

The waiter delivered the check. Of course, she insisted on paying, but I picked up the tab. "Don't insult me," I smiled.

"You're a tough cookie." She applied lipstick and stared at me the whole time. I was pleased.

We packed up our things: I zipped up my small black backpack, and she slipped her lipstick back in a black snakeskin case that she returned to her pocket. I was practical and charming. She was stylish and so damn sexy. I couldn't believe I was pursuing this roommate thing.



As we walked the two blocks, I realized how much attention she attracted. She was a genuine goddess. As we passed people, they stared, admiring her pretty brown skin glowing off her white dress.

We looked through the windows of art galleries and agreed these artists were related to the owners because most of the work was shit. I really was getting off on the fact that we agreed on many things: sharing food with certain people, Black funk music is great with sex, we loved our solitude and we could get moody—I'm hot—I'm cold—love me—get away from me! I was enjoying the evening way too much to depart without a goodnight kiss. I had promised myself, but the tension was making me want to rip my head off my shoulders. The thought of pressing my lips against her luscious Latina mouth was making my shorts feel tight and my underarms sweat. I needed a release and pronto, so I gently scooted her into the alley.

"Alicia...as far as I'm concerned..." I let out a big sigh, "I can't be your roommate because I'm too attracted to you and I want to see you again." The words sprang out of my mouth like a Jill-in-the-box. Shit. As my fingers combed back my hair, I wished I had delivered my statement more gracefully. Oh well. If she found this scene uncomfortable, she would have left my ass ages ago.

She grabbed my hand. "I'm attracted to you, too."

I felt a wave of electrical charge slither around my body. I closed my eyes and I could see myself pushing her up against the wall, pressing my soul against hers as I deeply massaged her back all the way down to her ass, spreading her cheeks. I wanted all of her inside my mouth.

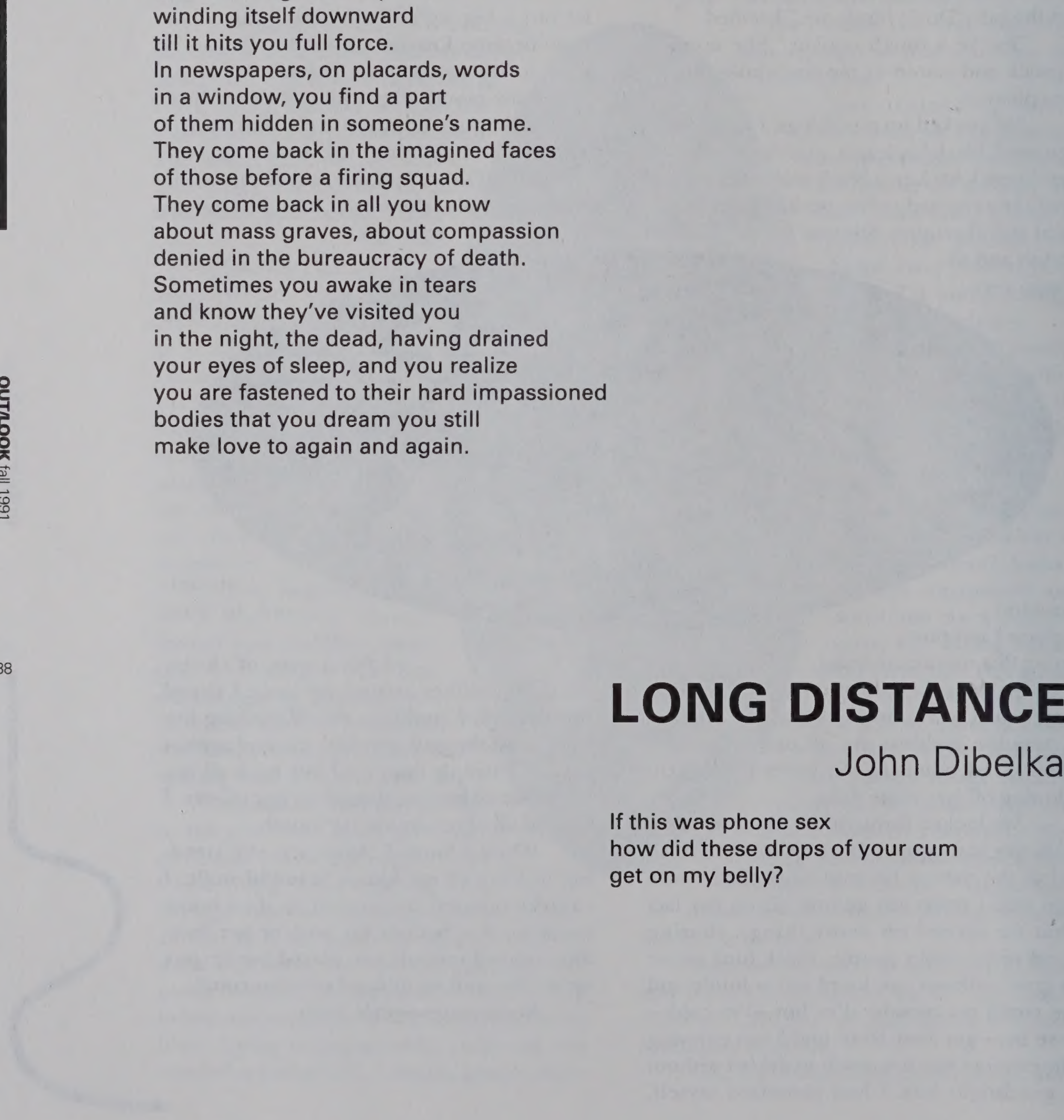
When I landed, Alicia was still standing in front of me with a beautiful smile. I slightly opened my mouth as if to make room for her bottom lip, and/or her face. She stepped towards me, placed her fingers on my lips and we inhaled simultaneously.

Roommates—yeah, right.

RESPONSIBILITY

Darrell g. h. Schramm

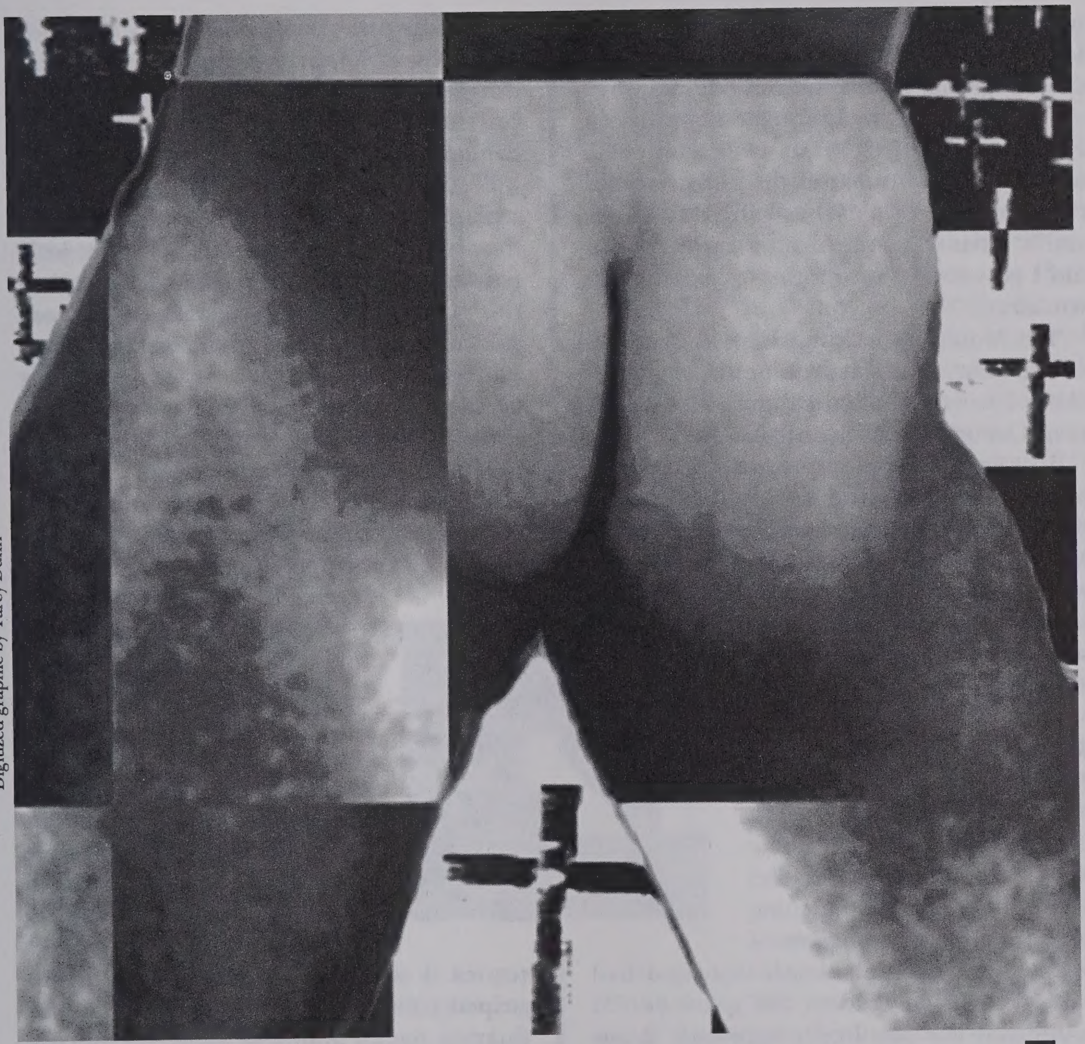
They come back when you least expect it.
Like wind high in the pines
winding itself downward
till it hits you full force.
In newspapers, on placards, words
in a window, you find a part
of them hidden in someone's name.
They come back in the imagined faces
of those before a firing squad.
They come back in all you know
about mass graves, about compassion
denied in the bureaucracy of death.
Sometimes you awake in tears
and know they've visited you
in the night, the dead, having drained
your eyes of sleep, and you realize
you are fastened to their hard impassioned
bodies that you dream you still
make love to again and again.



LONG DISTANCE

John Dibelka

If this was phone sex
how did these drops of your cum
get on my belly?



Digitized graphic by Tarey Dunn

Unprotected

Gil Cuadros

I cannot get this smell of hand lotion off of me.

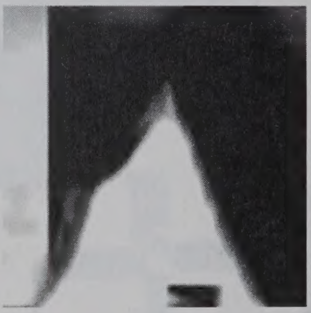
I've washed three times today, covered myself in cologne, sat in the steam room so that I could sweat it all out; but it's still there. It is faint in my beard. It is underneath my nails and I can smell it when I bring food to my mouth. It is here in my bed. It smells of cock and ass. It smells unnatural. It smells unsafe.

I knew I was too drunk, six bars already that afternoon, and on the Sunday that I promised my parents I would visit them. They wanted to have dinner with me, watch some TV. They worried about my ARC diagnosis, but they would never ask about it. They wondered when was I going to look like those men they had seen on the news, men who were dying of AIDS. They wanted to know when was I going to be sorry for the things that I did to become this way.

AIDS had already become an issue when I came out in '83. I was twenty-one. So along with the usual guilt trips to stop me from coming out: "What will your father say?" "What will your brother say?" "Where did I go wrong?" my mother asked, "Aren't you afraid?"

"But Mom, I'm in love." He was ten years older, wiser, blond hair, blue eyes, a furry chest. I loved the way he'd grab my ass, tell me, "Come on, baby, let me fuck you."

It wasn't a tragedy to move out, but I could hear my father crying, hitting the drywall that separated his room from mine. My mother sat at the dining room table, with its lion claw feet tearing into her slippers. She just stared into the china cabinet and wept.



John had met me at his door. He told me I could live with him forever. I lived with him for more than four years; then he died. I don't know why he ever went out with me. I couldn't even imagine going out with a kid of twenty-one. I tested soon after his death. A friend had said, "Not even cold in the grave yet." I found out that my T-cells were only thirty-five, may platelet count was critical, and my white cells said I needed a transfusion. Since then, I've stabilized, I have no symptoms except low T-counts. I rarely think about being sick when I take my AZT capsules.

On this day, I took my four o'clock pills with a swig of beer and headed for a new bar. My friend Nick drove. We'd been friends for more than ten years, and we've known each other since elementary school. It was this last bar that did me in. It was called The Brick. It had a rougher edge than the rest of the west-end bars. Today it proudly proclaimed it was "Hawaiian Daze." It was stenciled in black marker over a cheap Tom of Finland poster. It showed two sailors; one had his hand down the other's pants.

Nick and I were feeling great; our feet dragged in the white sand that was thrown on the hardwood floor. A cut-out hula dancer was pinned at her nipples to a cork bulletin board, and the moose head was strangled by a thin red lei. As we walked further into the bar, two men in leather jackets, faces uncut by razors, hair cropped to the skin, sporting grass skirts and fishnet stockings, lay on the pool table. They waved under the blow-up shark that was spinning like a record. Everyone was flashing back to disco. The Village People and their hits, "YMCA," "Macho Macho Man." On the video monitor they showed one of the singers, a telephone lineman, working the pole, his jeans ripped just below the crotch. Everyone was screaming and I was full of their energy. I was ready to explode. I needed to do something, make something happen, and like a cat, I pawed at the great white shark, suspended by the smallest test line. It made the bar stir, its waters already in a frenzy.

Nick and I played pool in the back room, smoking cigarettes and drinking vodka tonics. I was doing badly, knocking his striped balls into a pocket, making the cue jump in the air and land a few inches away. Missing shot after shot, I gave up. I put my head down on the table, in line of Nick's victory shot and told him, "Shoot the fucking ball, I'm ready." That's when I saw him.

His handlebars caught in my eyes, making me turn my face. Nick was still at the table trying some impossible trick. I bounced the rubber tip of the pole between my legs, grinning. This guy looked straight at me. I didn't really expect him to sit down next to me, on my stack of beer crates. I didn't think I was attractive enough, especially now with the virus. His confidence was apparent, like an open madras shirt. His rib cage was strong and voluminous. There was a serpentine chain around his throat. It clung tightly and moved when he said, "Do you want to go to my place?"

John had always said it was that easy. Go up to a guy and ask him point blank. I had thought it was a bit sleazy. I imagined it should be more like a wild bird ritual, with ruffled feathers, heavy squawking, and beaks intermingled. I really had no experience cruising; it had seemed to have become some lost art form. I thought about it, saying, "Well, maybe. What's your name?" The music was too loud and I just winged it, catching his question again, "Do you want to go to my place?" Nick was setting up another game. I told him, tugging on a loop on his jeans, "I'll see you later." I staggered out of the bar, following a man whose name I didn't hear.

We stopped at Rocky's liquor on the way to his place. I asked for a Pepsi. He came back with Coronas and a pot of spider mums. Driving up the hills, he told me they were for a friend who was sick in the hospital. He started talking about his condo, saying it was real nice. He then told me he had brought someone up there once and was ripped off. He talked of Louise Hay, philosophically. He told me of his gay brother who lived across the street, pointing out the top floor of a refurbished hotel. It had a history. Hollywood's best actresses had all lived there at one time. He started reciting the prices of other condos around his. I put my hand on his lap.

Inside the garage, we walked side by side. His steps were hard, businesslike shoes on wet cement. The puddles reflected the bars of fluorescent light. They shook nervously as we went by, while the chrome doors of the elevator opened for us. He held the door open for me with his arm. When I stepped in, he pressed the stop button. I thought that maybe he wanted to kiss me or something. Instead he looked at me, as if he wanted me to stare down. I did, embarrassed at what I was doing. He asked if I was a hustler. I said no. He didn't seem convinced.

He wasn't going to touch me, even after I crossed the threshold. Without much grandeur, he showed each of his rooms. The place was beautiful. There were beveled glass tables and shelves, a leather sectional. Each room was immaculate, unlike my place. There were dishes in my sink that I would sooner throw out than wash. He led me to his balcony. Comfortable chairs of azure were accented by a pale blue rattan table, on which thick green candles, absent of burning wicks, rested. He unbuckled his pants, then sat down, rubbing his cock, thumbing the shaft. He then pulled out his balls, letting them rest over the teeth of his zipper.

Other apartments crowded in on us, like a cubist painting. Their large black windows were opaque because of the screens that were made not to be seen through. There was no space here either, no breathing room. I thought that other people could see us out here with his fly open. I undid my belt and pulled on my button jeans. I told him I liked the sound of Levis opening.

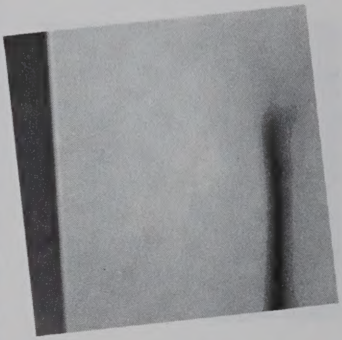
He got up to get us a drink. He said from the kitchen, "Did you notice I have no curtains?" Coming back out on the balcony he said, "I have nothing to hide." I looked around there were no curtains, no blinds, "just doors," I thought.

I had to hide everything. Like the gold wedding band that is on a chain my parents had given me. The chain had a cross on it too. I had promised my parents that I'd wear the cross all the time. They didn't know I wore it with John's ring. To them it would seem immoral; John was the reason I was sick. Clothes can hide these defects, like the blue-red pinpoints on my veins, a sign of bimonthly blood workups and the virus. I wondered if he could tell, if that's why his smile was a bit wicked. I thought at this point I should be responsible and make sure we play safe. I didn't want to get too carried away.

He started walking toward me, to the bedroom that was behind me. I stopped him, "I'm feeling a little uncomfortable, maybe we should talk first."

He said gently and reassuringly, "Don't worry, I won't hurt you." The words fell out of him like a whisper. I did begin to worry. First he tells me about getting ripped off by some previous trick, he asked me if I was a hustler, now he tells me don't worry I won't hurt you.

I said, "I should tell you something first." I hesitated, afraid of rejection, as his face changed to annoyance. I went on, "I'm positive." I felt like a child confessing his sins, kneeling in a dark room. I felt or thought that maybe he was positive too. He talked about his sick friend, the Hay group, it seemed probably that he had the virus.



His face registered nothing. "I tested negative to HIV." It hit me like a broom. I saw him in my imagination, in the tearooms getting blown by the porcelain bowls, cruising parks under lattice-covered walkways, walking around in a wet white towel at a bathhouse late at night. I knew I was being unfair to him, thinking that he was some seedy person who escaped the curse. I saw him do these things, in my mind, things that are considered unsafe, almost sinful now. I couldn't help but feel cheated, I had done none of these things. I didn't deserve this disease.

He sat back in his chair, lighting a cigarette. "Do you feel comfortable with this?"

I said, "I feel a little weird."

"Like how?"

"Like I'm infectious material." He winced at this remark. I saw myself being transported in an orange-red garbage bag, getting tossed out by sallow-colored gloves.

Recomposed, he said rather smugly, almost challenging me, "Well, if you don't feel right about this, it's fine with me. I accept myself for what I am." I thought it must be easy when you're negative.

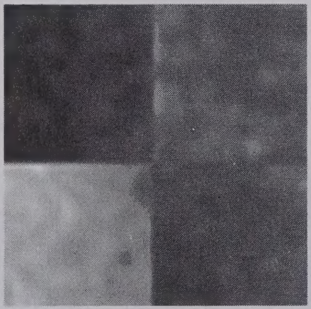
With a softer voice he said, "We can just beat off." I took a drink from my beer. Cold liquid went inside of me, shutting down parts of me like a machine. He closed his argument. "That's all we have to do." He pulled off his shirt and hung it over the rail. I began to undress in the doorway of his bedroom.

He uncovered his bed neatly, folding the spread in half, then quarter. His room was spotless. Lights came from behind the headboard. The cream-colored wood twisted like a Bernini pulpit. The shadows bent around the corners of the room. The ceiling sparkled with glitter. One wall was all closet doors. He opened one, placing the comforter on the center shelf. I expected him to pull out a plain percale to protect his Southwestern sheets. Sheets like that need to stay clean and sex was dirty. He just pulled down his pants. I took my lead from his, tossing my shirt to the floor, lacking his grace for folding it away.

We got on the bed slowly, our knees pressing into the soft mattress. He reached for my left nipple and I withdrew. His hands were cold as the air coming through the open door. He stuck his fingers into my mouth to warm them. I felt their tips on my jagged back teeth. My tongue tasted the saline skin pulling out, over my lips, then slipping back in again. I was like a scavenger, hands tearing the hair that grew over his shoulders, tugging at his prick, pointed upright and bent. I was gentle with his foreskin, letting it peel back on its own; but he asked for more, "Pull harder, grip it tighter, twist it around." He reached behind me for the nightstand and brought out a bottle of hand lotion. He poured it on the both of us. The cool, motherly scent filled the room and oppressed me. I couldn't get hard now. When he made me hold out my hand, I couldn't help but think of my mother using this every day. She would put it on, spreading it evenly over her arms and white hands. She would remove her wedding ring that clutched a diamond. I also remembered mornings where John would pour it on his shoulders and ask me to rub it in. He would fall on the bed and wait for me. After I finished, I would cuddle into his side, trying to stay warm, drifting back into dreams.

I kept on shrinking, becoming smaller and smaller. I thought of how I hated hand cream as a lubricant. I said, disappointed, "Go ahead and finish, I can't."

He stopped stroking his cock and looked at mine, limp and unexcited. He asked me, "Why don't you spend the night?" Then without any response from me, he pulled me under his covers, wrapping his legs over my body. His thighs became binding material. I could hear him mumble something. I started trying to fall asleep, glad because of all the alcohol that was inside me, it was making the room spin. His hard dick was still touching me, coming up inside the crack of my ass. He wasn't sleeping. His mouth was at the back of my neck, warm air blowing on my nape. I stared out the open glass door that led to the balcony, where this whole thing started. I heard what I said. Then I heard what he said.



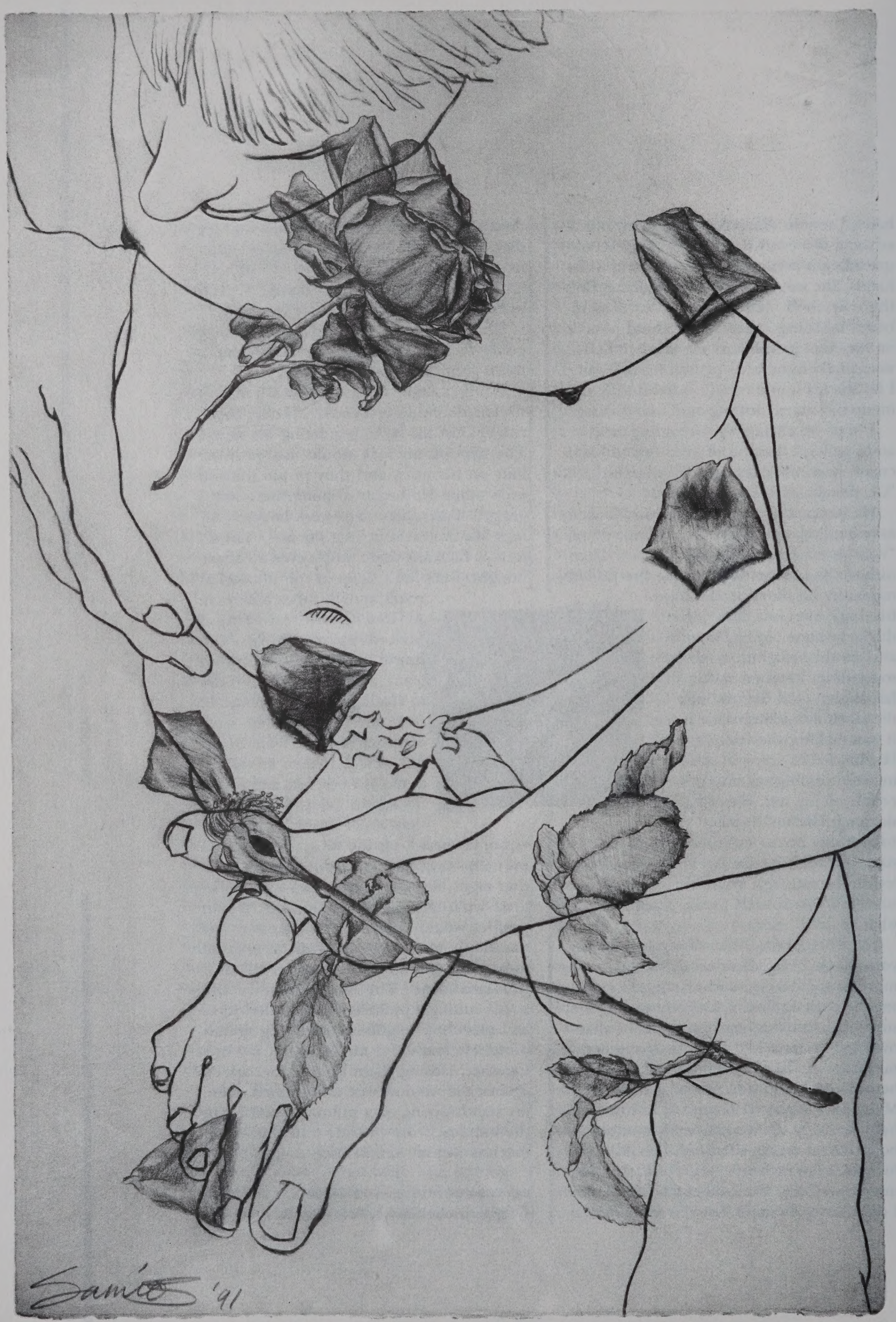
He whispered, "Why don't you lie on your back." He sounded different now, more domineering, authoritative. I could see the dark outline of his body against the stars of the ceiling, against the lewd shadows that looked like snakes, worms, and mushrooms. His chest billowed like a sail. I became his cabin boy, learning the ropes. My ankles began to sweat. My wrists were held down by the weight of his hands and body. He sat on my chest and I could smell his cock a few inches from my face, taunting me. He told me, "Suck that dick," and I did. I didn't even hesitate. I swallowed him like meat. It made me choke. "You like that big dick, don't you?" I nodded. It seemed enormous, really too big. I began to split in half.

One side of me was screaming, "This is wrong. This is unsafe. What are you doing?"

The other side said, "Shut up, you're going to die anyways. Enjoy this because this is going to be your last time."

It was easy to take him in. My mouth stretched as wide as it could. My chin would rub against his balls, regulating his speed. The hair on my face would mix with the hair on his nuts, and they would pull on each other. He began to pump hard and I gagged. Later, his hands were between my legs, his fingers touching my ass. I knew I let him fuck me, there wasn't even an afterthought. I couldn't sleep in the unfamiliar room, quiet now as a church. At five in the morning I picked up my things, the damp shirt, my wrinkled jeans, my unlaced shoes. I ran to catch the bus and it waited for me. It was filled with Mexicanos, some from South America. The men all looked at me as I entered, and I took my seat quickly. I was afraid they could smell the shit that was in my beard, see the sticky shine of cum over my body, and know what I had done that night. Each one of those short, stocky men with their black hair and Indian profiles would know. The seat next to me was empty until a young Mexican man sat down. He spread his legs open till they touched mine. The bus tore down the street, hitting a pothole. It jarred the riders and made my neighbor rub his leg against mine. He smiled at me. I pulled my legs together, closing them tight. I feel asleep against the window that was cracked open, my hands acting as a pillow, breathing in the exhaust from outside and the lotion that was over my hands, heavy as spring air.

Unprotected will be published in ***Indivisible: New Short Fiction by Gay and Lesbian Writers,*** by Plume in September 1991.



William Samios ***He loves me, he loves me not ...*** **1991**

THE SECRET EPIDEMIC

Walt Odets, Ph.D.

In the second decade of the AIDS epidemic, I am writing not about the horrifying toll of AIDS itself, but about the psychological toll of AIDS on uninfected gay and bisexual men—the group we in mental health call "the worried well." About one-third of my private practice of clinical psychology and psychotherapy is still with the uninfected, and it is my observation in this work that we have seriously misassessed the problems of this HIV-negative group. If we accept Mayor Agnos's figure that to date more San Franciscans have died of AIDS than died in the four wars of the twentieth century—combined and tripled—how *could* it be that the survivors of this event would be merely worried, or be well? In my opinion, there is now a psychological *epidemic* among HIV survivors, and it is one that, were it not for the stupefying impact of the HIV epidemic itself, would have anyone concerned with the gay community and its future in a panic all by itself.

The problems of the uninfected have been hard to discuss for many reasons. Appropriate attention to the problems of HIV-infected people is one; but other less healthy reasons include *shame* about having apparently escaped the virus and having problems despite that good fortune; and *guilt* about surviving at all. While I cannot now imagine redirecting resources from HIV-infected people to the uninfected, I do think it is time we clarified the problems of the uninfected. Most importantly, we must begin to address the continuing seroconversion among gay men, a phenomenon the San Francisco AIDS Foundation now publicly acknowledges as the "Third Wave" of the epidemic.

The psychological epidemic among uninfected men is, in many ways, familiar in its presentation, though not in the sheer numbers affected. The most prominent features are serious mood and anxiety disorders. One New York study suggests that fully 39 percent of HIV asymptomatic, presumably healthy, gay men meet the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic criteria for clinical mood- or anxiety-related disorders.

Also commonly seen, though little discussed, are the traditional male sexual dysfunctions: disinterest or aversion, impotence, and inhibited orgasm. Among gay men, however, there is much evidence that these problems are based less in common interpersonal problems and more in phobic anxiety. For many gay men, conscious and unconscious association of sex and AIDS has made it difficult or impossible to achieve orgasm while there is physical—especially genital—contact with another man.

Another common problem is hypochondria, or the preoccupation with physical signs and symptoms and the anxiety that they signify disease. Again there is a special twist complicating treatment, which is that the complexity of epidemiological and biological models—including many new questions about the reliability of the common HIV-antibody test, the Elisa—make some

Many are finding it easier to be threatened by AIDS, to die of AIDS,

A COUNSELING PATIENT TALKS ABOUT SURVIVOR GUILT

A day after negative results from a much-postponed, much-debated HIV test, a patient told me:

> I'm pleased, of course, but I find myself very sad. I'm actually quite confused and don't know what I feel. When I got the results I felt like crying, though I can't say why, and I didn't. It wasn't just relief. I called Mike with the news and he wanted to go out and celebrate, and I thought, well how can you celebrate this? I couldn't imagine. There are too many positive people, and I can't imagine talking about being negative, it's not the kind of thing you could go around and say, "You know, I'm negative." I've expected for so long, at least four or five years, to be positive—I'm talking about allegiance, I guess. I realize that I have to rethink what the gay community is. I don't know anymore what it is because the HIV has changed it all, and I have no idea where I fit anymore into whatever it is.

In the week following the blood test, the patient found he was fearful of being alone, and had several anxiety episodes of "panic attacks," the first in his car the evening after his blood test results, following a dinner with an HIV-positive friend and his HIV-symptomatic roommate. He felt he had already "lost" these positive friends.

> I'm no longer sharing or thinking I was sharing with them the most important thing in our lives. Now it is just part of *their* lives. I'd like to escape from that now, or sometimes I'd like to, because I can suddenly see every now and then, for a minute, that I could actually have a normal life, instead of living with death everywhere. Part of me really wants a life like that.

At this point he lapsed into several minutes of silence, and I asked him, "You said a life 'like that.' A life like what?"

apparently hypochondriacal concerns more realistic than we are comfortable admitting.

Finally, among the features of the psychological picture is *survivor guilt.* Such generally unconscious guilt was first described by Niederland in survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Struggling for and succeeding in having new lives, the survivors then succumbed to depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic conditions. Such symptoms, said Niederland, arose from identifications with loved ones who had not survived. Survivors experienced persistent feelings of guilt for having survived the calamity to which their loved ones succumbed.

Such survivor guilt is a pervasive and profound issue of the HIV epidemic, and a complex one. I will simply introduce the subject here by saying that I find a psychological "predisposition" to such feelings in some men, in the form of much early psychological conflict characterized by guilt and loss. Survivor guilt is one of the most destructive of the psychological phenomena we are now seeing, but it is also one of the most responsive to psychotherapeutic intervention.

Many of the problems I have just discussed are psychologically, if not logically, intelligible responses to the horror of the HIV epidemic. But in the case of guilt and guilt-mediated depression particularly, the problems are often exacerbated by a confused *identification* with AIDS. Certainly we in the gay community are deeply involved with AIDS because we must be. But gay men now often "come out" as gay by talking about AIDS rather than about feelings, relationships, or sexuality. When we thus speak of AIDS *instead* of homosexuality, it becomes apparent that the psychological and social meanings of AIDS—as opposed to its realities—have engaged us to an extent not explained by the facts alone.

This "homosexualization" of AIDS—which is to say, the unrealistic and unnecessary psychological entanglement of the gay identity with AIDS—becomes more intelligible when we consider homophobia. Homophobia—which as Paul Monette tells

***or to be guilty for not dying of it, than it has ever been to* be gay.**

He answered,

> I don't know what I meant. I meant, I guess, a life with death and without death. I meant both. I'm very confused because I feel now like it's very risky to hope that I could be free of AIDS and this whole life it's made for all of us.

Again he lapsed into several minutes of silence, and I finally asked why that would be risky.

> I guess because it doesn't seem possible, because I still feel, if I'm really honest, as if I've got the virus, and to hope that I don't, to really act as if I don't, will be pushing my luck. The minute I feel reasonably O.K., that I'm safe, it will get me. And I also have the feeling—I know this isn't true, I think—that I wonder if it would be O.K. with my friends who are positive, or who are sick. I wonder if it would *really* be O.K. with them if I were negative. I'm thinking of Robert, and I wonder if he will ever forgive me for being negative.

"Why would he have to forgive you?" I asked.

"I don't know. Because I have abandoned him?" the patient asked me.

"You ask me if you have abandoned him. Have you?"

"I don't know."

"You sound as if you feel you have."

"Oh, I know I *feel* I have—but I haven't."

"If you had," I asked, "What would that mean? How would you make that up to Robert?"

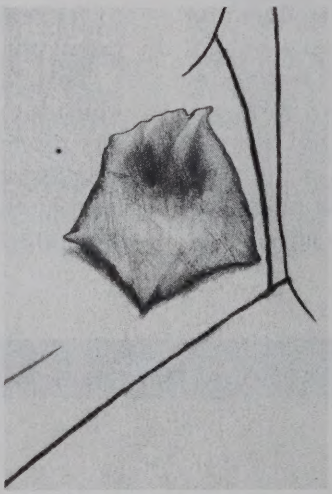
> There is no way. But if I were sick I would not have to—there would be nothing to make up, and believe it or not I've often thought I would rather be sick. I hate to say it, because I know so many people who would give anything *not* to be sick. I would never tell them this either. I could never tell them I'm not sick, and I could never tell them that I wanted to be. There is no way I can see to make this up to anybody.

Walt Odets

us in *Borrowed Time* is the internalized self-hatred of others—has facilitated the shifting of familiar psychological conflicts from homosexuality to AIDS.

Once isolated for our sexuality, we are now threatened with isolation for our virus. Homosexuals have often been considered sick by society, have homophobically considered themselves sick, and are now sick with AIDS. Homosexuals have often been threatened with punishment and homophobically expecting it; we now, often unconsciously, feel punished with AIDS and, finally, having suffered guilt about sexuality, many of us are now feeling guilt for *having* AIDS, for *not* having AIDS, or for not doing enough to help others survive.

One reason many gay men have thus shifted familiar psychological conflicts from homosexuality to AIDS lurks in the familiar fact that 10,000 to 12,000 of us now gather annually at international conferences to discuss AIDS. We never did this to address the crippling psychological toll exacted by society from men when they were merely homosexual.



Such gatherings are possible, in part, because AIDS has the respectability of science and medicine; it allows a man to have a disease rather than *be* and *live* one; and, finally, it allows us to talk about everything except the emotional, sexual, and interpersonal issues that are for so many too painful and too difficult. For those gay men accustomed to life on the fringes of a rejecting heterosexual society, the acceptance gained by having AIDS can feel irresistible. Many are finding it easier to be threatened by AIDS, to die of AIDS, or to be guilty for not dying of it, than it has ever been to *be gay.* Despite all its horror, AIDS has given many gay men an identity which is easier than that of being homosexual.

The cost of such acceptance for the infected man is at the very least the awful cost of being infected with HIV; but for the uninfected, the entanglement of gay identity with issues of AIDS exacts costs of a different, less obvious kind. Survival may be experienced as a betrayal and abandonment of those who are sick; the gay man may feel that in survival he is betraying his personal identity as a gay person; and he may feel that he is no longer part of the community—now, so it often seems, all sick or already gone—that is the only human community in which he has ever been able to be who he truly is. A friend expressed such feelings when he referred to his HIV-negative status by commenting, half-jokingly and half-regretfully, "I feel as if I'm being left out of the great event of our times."

Such allegiance, conscious and unconscious, reflects feelings that being gay means having AIDS—or at the very least, being crushed by the losses of AIDS—and it inspires many men, especially the young who know nothing but the age of AIDS, to have AIDS or to have lives otherwise made intolerable by it. If gay men cannot clarify such confusions of identity, cannot discuss the bewildering and painful feelings they are experiencing as a result of the viral epidemic, it will cost us many more lives than necessary and, as a community, decades of psychological growth.

I have saved discussion of safe and unsafe sex to this point because it is truly the bottom line for the uninfected man: The practice of safe sex is his statement of commitment to biological, if not psychological, survival. Yet the facts about the forbidden topic of unsafe sex are alarming.

One-third of gay men in this country are now reporting regular unsafe sex, and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation tells us that as many as 40 percent of San Francisco's twenty- to twenty-five-year-old gay-identified men may now be infected with HIV. In safe-sex-educated 1991 ignorance no longer explains the whole problem, and I think we must look elsewhere for insight. Among other things, we must begin to think about the potential lethality of unsafe sex as not only a deterrent, but, for many, a motivation to practice it.

The unconscious desire to *not survive* —because of depression, loss, and guilt about surviving—is surely an important, not uncommon motivation for unsafe sex. Also important is the unconscious belief that one *will not* survive—an expression of helplessness and resignation. The denial of fear about both safe and unsafe sex; plunging counterphobically into unsafe sex to master one's fear of it; poor self-esteem; and the experience of desirable intimacy in unsafe behaviors, are all also significant contributors to the motivation to practice unsafe sex.

These are issues we *can* address and we must overcome the politics and prohibitions surrounding the subject so that we may do so. There is tremendous fear among those who work in AIDS services that unsafe sex will not be tolerated by the straight society that funds much of these services: "You gays can no longer claim innocence about the virus, and if you get it now, you're on your own." But straight society has never approved of gay sex in any context, and certainly has never been willing to acknowledge its importance for gay men and women. Such denial causes a society that had all but buried the condom as a medical prophylactic and birth control device to now expect gay men to take to it with pleasure and appreciation. Human feelings and human relationships are complex, and sexuality is a complex part of them. That sexual behaviors are not easily changed seems self-evident, and unless we are able to acknowledge that fact, we have no hope of changing them and thus no hope of a viable gay male community for the foreseeable future.

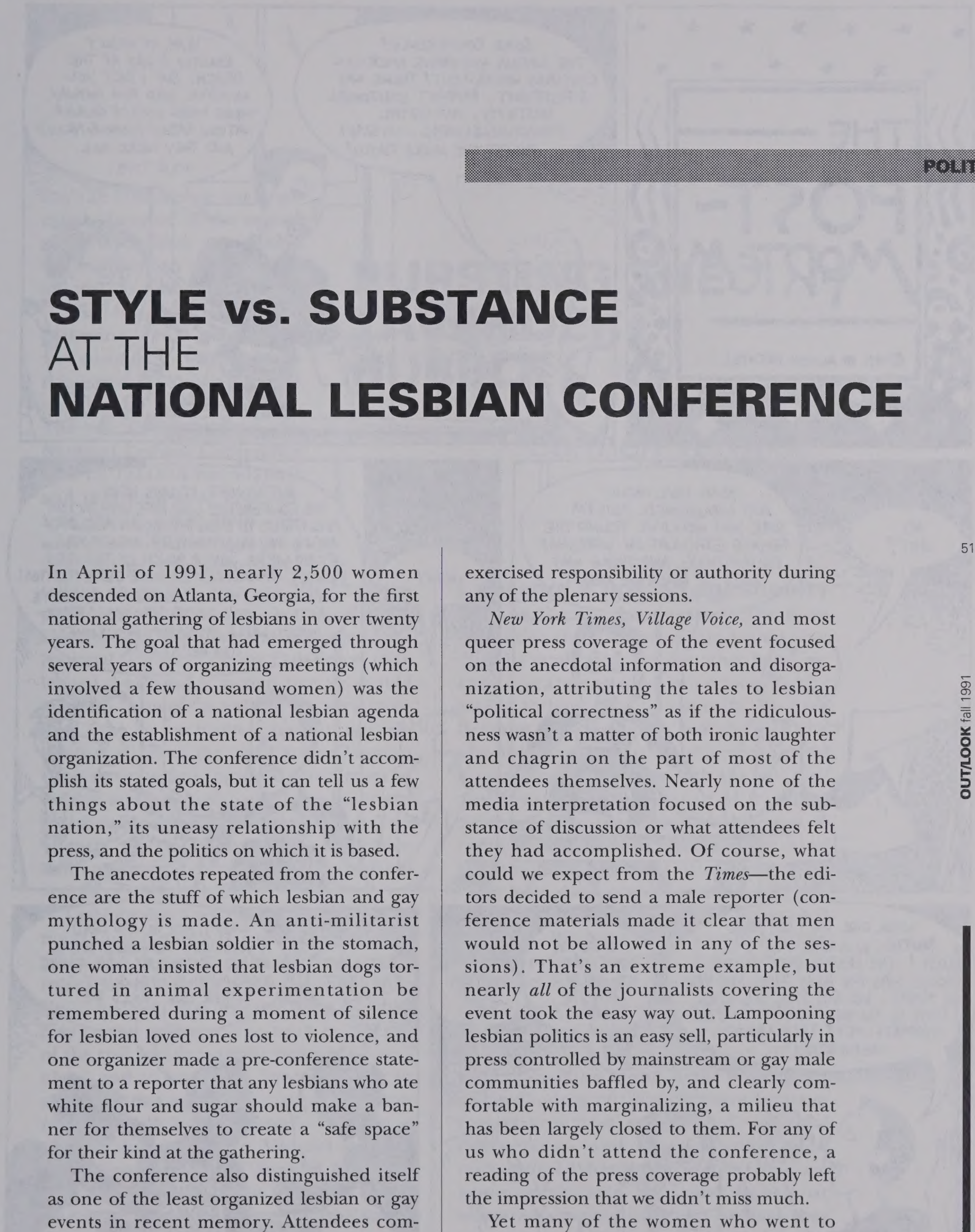
Twenty years ago, depression, anxiety, guilt, and isolation were common features in the lives of many homosexual men, perhaps a majority. This was the case, above all else, because one was not allowed to talk about one's homosexuality, and about the feelings and problems that it brought to one's life on the fringes of a largely disapproving society. Depression, anxiety, guilt, and isolation are, once again, becoming ordinary in the lives of too many HIV-negative men, and once again, one is not allowed to talk about the problems and feelings. Many uninfected gay and bisexual men, who make up a large part of their communities of the future, are at grave risk in this psychological sense. Too many are retreating in the face of this plague, its real-world horrors and its psychological ones, into the historically, if not personally, familiar psychological closet of isolation and loneliness.

A twenty-three-year-old gay man who had, a few weeks before, received a positive HIV test result, said a remarkable thing to me: "I'm sometimes glad to think that in ten years I'll be dead. By then the only gay people left will be those whose lives were ruined by watching the rest of us die." This is a horrible thought, and an exaggeration, surely, but there seems to me much truth in his words. I hope that we are able to work against the very possibility.

SIGNS OF LOVE

Lesléa Newman

Danger Ahead
Caution
Proceed at Own Risk
Scenic View
Soft Shoulder
Bear Right
Bear Left
Curves
Slow
No Standing
Yield
Do Not Speed
Road Narrows
Thickly Settled
One Way
Do Not Stop
Tunnel Ahead
Enter Here
Merge
Bump
Slippery When Wet
No Exit
Stay In Lane
No Delays
No Stopping Anytime
Crest
Highest Elevation
Slope
Exit
Rest Area



STYLE vs. SUBSTANCE AT THE NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE

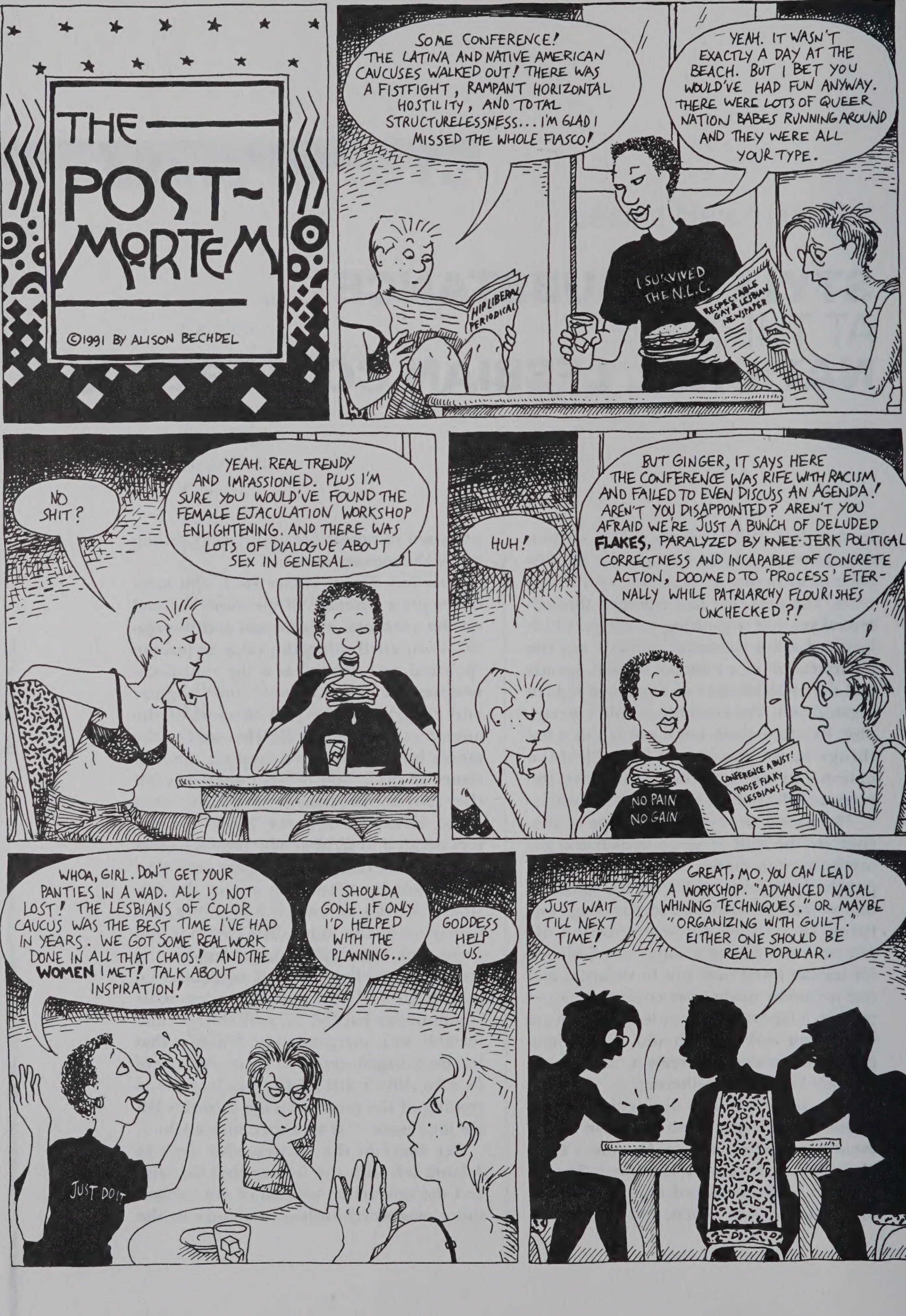
In April of 1991, nearly 2,500 women descended on Atlanta, Georgia, for the first national gathering of lesbians in over twenty years. The goal that had emerged through several years of organizing meetings (which involved a few thousand women) was the identification of a national lesbian agenda and the establishment of a national lesbian organization. The conference didn't accomplish its stated goals, but it can tell us a few things about the state of the "lesbian nation," its uneasy relationship with the press, and the politics on which it is based.

The anecdotes repeated from the conference are the stuff of which lesbian and gay mythology is made. An anti-militarist punched a lesbian soldier in the stomach, one woman insisted that lesbian dogs tortured in animal experimentation be remembered during a moment of silence for lesbian loved ones lost to violence, and one organizer made a pre-conference statement to a reporter that any lesbians who ate white flour and sugar should make a banner for themselves to create a "safe space" for their kind at the gathering.

The conference also distinguished itself as one of the least organized lesbian or gay events in recent memory. Attendees complained that there were continual changes in room assignments and no master schedule of plenaries or panels, and that no one exercised responsibility or authority during any of the plenary sessions.

New York Times, Village Voice, and most queer press coverage of the event focused on the anecdotal information and disorganization, attributing the tales to lesbian "political correctness" as if the ridiculousness wasn't a matter of both ironic laughter and chagrin on the part of most of the attendees themselves. Nearly none of the media interpretation focused on the substance of discussion or what attendees felt they had accomplished. Of course, what could we expect from the *Times*—the editors decided to send a male reporter (conference materials made it clear that men would not be allowed in any of the sessions). That's an extreme example, but nearly *all* of the journalists covering the event took the easy way out. Lampooning lesbian politics is an easy sell, particularly in press controlled by mainstream or gay male communities baffled by, and clearly comfortable with marginalizing, a milieu that has been largely closed to them. For any of us who didn't attend the conference, a reading of the press coverage probably left the impression that we didn't miss much.

Yet many of the women who went to Atlanta left with the feeling that the trip, and the interaction with all of the lesbians there, was worthwhile—no thanks to the


THE POST-MORTEM
©1991 BY ALISON BECHDEL
SOME CONFERENCE! THE LATINA AND NATIVE AMERICAN CAUCUSES WALKED OUT! THERE WAS A FISTFIGHT, RAMPANT HORIZONTAL HOSTILITY, AND TOTAL STRUCTURELESSNESS... I'M GLAD I MISSED THE WHOLE FIASCO!
HIP LIBERAL PERIODICAL
I SURVIVED THE N.L.C.
YEAH. IT WASN'T EXACTLY A DAY AT THE BEACH. BUT I BET YOU WOULD'VE HAD FUN ANYWAY. THERE WERE LOTS OF QUEER NATION BABES RUNNING AROUND AND THEY WERE ALL YOUR TYPE.
RESPECTABLE GAY & LESBIAN NEWSPAPER
NO SHIT?
YEAH. REAL TRENDY AND IMPASSIONED. PLUS I'M SURE YOU WOULD'VE FOUND THE FEMALE EJACULATION WORKSHOP ENLIGHTENING. AND THERE WAS LOTS OF DIALOGUE ABOUT SEX IN GENERAL.
HUH!
BUT GINGER, IT SAYS HERE THE CONFERENCE WAS RIFE WITH RACISM AND FAILED TO EVEN DISCUSS AN AGENDA! AREN'T YOU DISAPPOINTED? AREN'T YOU AFRAID WE'RE JUST A BUNCH OF DELUDED FLAKES, PARALYZED BY KNEE-JERK POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND INCAPABLE OF CONCRETE ACTION, DOOMED TO 'PROCESS' ETERNALLY WHILE PATRIARCHY FLOURISHES UNCHECKED?!
NO PAIN NO GAIN
CONFERENCE A BUST! THOSE FLAKY LESBIANS!
WHOA, GIRL. DON'T GET YOUR PANTIES IN A WAD. ALL IS NOT LOST! THE LESBIANS OF COLOR CAUCUS WAS THE BEST TIME I'VE HAD IN YEARS. WE GOT SOME REAL WORK DONE IN ALL THAT CHAOS! AND THE WOMEN I MET! TALK ABOUT INSPIRATION!
I SHOULDA GONE. IF ONLY I'D HELPED WITH THE PLANNING...
GODDESS HELP US.
JUST DO IT
JUST WAIT TILL NEXT TIME!
GREAT, MO. YOU CAN LEAD A WORKSHOP. "ADVANCED NASAL WHINING TECHNIQUES." OR MAYBE "ORGANIZING WITH GUILT." EITHER ONE SHOULD BE REAL POPULAR.

way the conference was organized—because of the opportunity to establish or maintain ties with lesbian activists from around the country.

What has emerged since the gathering is that lesbians are not content to formulate or implement politics in the same way that we have in the past. The two addresses from the National Lesbian Conference that *OUT/LOOK* has adapted and reprinted here illustrate that shifting mood. Both were well received by those who attended the conference—it's telling, then, that both are critical of the politics on which the conference was based. Urvashi Vaid, the Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, challenged the "lesbian" notion that we should have no leaders, as well as the very basic idea that an exclusively lesbian agenda exists at all. Both she and Carmen Vazquez (who serves as San Francisco coordinator of lesbian and gay health services) point out that a continued political emphasis on "one of each" places the impetus on lip service and appearance rather than the concrete actions of the individual.

Lesbians don't yet have a national movement, and if there is any agenda, it may merely be the sum of the varying activist roles that we take on across the country. As Vazquez states, "our only real hope for unity may be our willingness to work in defense of the civil and democratic rights of all people ... and to work with anyone willing to sign on to that agenda no matter how incorrectly they talk, look, or dress."

After the conference, Vazquez said she felt disheartened. "Still," she said, "progress isn't always a vertical line or even a circle. There are spirals of change. Maybe someday we'll look back on the NLC as one of them."

Robin Stevens

BURSTING THE LAVENDER BUBBLE

Carmen Vazquez

I observe a lesbian community that, on the one hand, says racism is an institutionalized form of oppression that must be eradicated. On the other hand, we spend years engaged in consciousness raising without an action agenda. We have become very skilled at dealing with the symbols and personal expressions of oppression rather than with the political and institutional substance of it. White sisters educate themselves on how not to insult us, but you can count on one hand the number of lesbians of color who are executive directors of lesbian and gay organizations—and have some fingers left to count. We have yet to create a single lesbian-of-color multiracial organization dedicated to political change. We claim our allegiance to diversity and then figure out who we can exclude from our events.

What is our understanding of the political realities of our time? What is our understanding of the difference between the jargon and symbols of political correctness and the substance of oppression? What is our unity? These are not questions to be asked lightly or answered simply. I ask them because they are questions I have to answer all the time in my efforts to discern how my cultural heritage, my multicultural experience, my experience of poverty, and my sexual identity inform my understanding of oppression and my response to it.

Too many questions. Let me tell you a story. In 1984, I went to Nicaragua on a delegation of women called Somos Hermanas (We Are Sisters). It was truly a journey of magic. It was the first time in my life I'd ever been to a socialist country, to a country in Latin America other than Puerto Rico. It was an opportunity to bring my passion for solidarity with other Latina women, my lesbian self, and my anti-racist self together. I had an invaluable experience in how I could be Latina, lesbian, and able to challenge the assumptions of heterosexism within the context of my own culture.

One night our delegation and a delegation of Cuban musicians—all men—were to have a "social" together. We had music and rum and lots of Coca Cola and dancing, of course. The men were asking the women to dance and a great time was had by all except that the lesbians were none too thrilled by this arrangement. In deference to our hosts, we said nothing, but in the midst of that silence my friend Lucrecia Bermudez strode across the patio and very formally asked "*Bailemos*?"—"Shall we dance?" We did. Not a minute into our dance, a Cuban gentleman took it upon himself to correct the situation. Lucrecia stopped in mid-beat, held me firmly, and told the young man no, thank you. This is *our* dance. And we danced and we danced and we danced. The silence had been broken. Our dignity remained intact. Women danced with each other when they chose to. It was that night that I met Marcia, my lover and partner of six years.

For one brief moment that night in Nicaragua, Lucrecia and I simultaneously embraced the rituals of dance that we know in our blood and shattered the heterosexual premise that a woman will always prefer a man. We didn't caucus about this beforehand. We didn't ask anyone how they felt. We didn't stage a demonstration. We engaged in a simple act made possible by our respect for our culture and our political unity with the Nicaraguans.

Lucrecia's and my small act of cultural militancy may seem insignificant, but we can't say we are committed to ending heterosexism and then live in lavender bubbles where no heterosexual shall touch us or speak with us or work with us. We must act. We also cannot act as if racism originated within such a bubble. Working against racism means changing miserable housing conditions of the poor in this country, and making sure that Bush and his cronies don't dismember the Civil Rights Act. I can't buy into a standard for "political correctness" that is based on white lesbian cultural values.

Challenging homophobia in the Latino community is no more and no less a challenge than it is to challenge it in any other ethnic community. I must speak the truth of my experience, with my mother, with Latino kids in San Francisco high schools, with the taxi driver. I must be visible and without apology whether I'm among lesbians or Central American refugees who are not lesbians. I must have the humility to understand that my place in the struggle for liberation is one of many and that my struggles as a lesbian are no more and no less an institutional reality than are my struggles against racism and sexism and economic injustice. I am a whole human being, not fragments of one.

As a Puertoriquena I have much more to learn from the rhythms, myths, traditions, and values of my people about who I am and my sexuality than I will ever learn from JoAnn Loulan about power and roles, intimacy and romance, flirting and dancing and everything. For example, on more than one occasion my tie has been trashed as a symbol of the patriarchy, as an emulation of "macho" unworthy of a true lesbian. What my critics misunderstand is that I *am* macha. I am proud of my people and my heritage. I will fight to defend the dignity and honor of my people and my family, whomever I define them to be. The tie, the concepts of pride and dignity and defense of family are not, by divine proclamation, male. They are mine as well. I will wear a tie because there are as many machas among my people walking around in dresses as there are those of us wearing ties.

Neither racism nor heterosexism is an abstraction that can be studied and learned in a book or reduced to a dynamic between two individuals. Our ability to act on the premise that oppression is an institutional reality that requires radical change in the cultural and racial makeup of our organizations and leadership lags far behind our consciousness-raising efforts. I, for one, believe that the political realities of our time don't afford us the luxury of spending the next twenty years figuring out how to be sensitive to one another. I believe our only real hope for unity hinges on our willingness to work in defense of the civil and democratic rights of all people, on our willingness to work for social justice issues such as national health care and the demilitarization of the budget, on our willingness to work for peace, and on our willingness to coalesce and work with anyone willing to sign on to that agenda no matter how incorrect they talk or look or dress.

I have a vision of a progressive, multiracial lesbian and gay diaspora that includes and celebrates the stories and cultural discourse of all our people. It is a vision that can become a reality only if we move ourselves beyond the rhetoric of the "isms" to actions and the creation of organizations that put an end to our isolating ways.

LET'S PUT OUR OWN HOUSE IN ORDER

Urvashi Vaid

We are here at the National Lesbian Conference because of the passion, love, excitement, and desire we feel for women. We are here because spectacular forces of evil and prejudice threaten our very existence as lesbians.

It is this evil present in Judge Campbell's decision denying Karen Thompson guardianship of Sharon Kowalski. It is this evil that murdered Rebecca Wight, and wounded her lover, Claudia Brenner, as they were camping in the mountains of Pennsylvania. It is this evil found in the cowardly silence of all politicians who will not stand up to defend lesbians, will not pass laws to end the daily, massive, relentless mountain of prejudice we face.

Society identifies and defines us only through our relation (or lack thereof) to men—lesbians are masculine, man-haters, the sexual fantasies of straight men. Even social change movements, gay and lesbian organizations, civil rights and feminist organizations ghettoize the multiple issues of discrimination that we face. They still tokenize us or put our concerns and voices on the back burner. Until very recently we have had absolutely no images in mainstream culture of out, proud, powerful, strong, independent women.

We gather here at this conference in Atlanta in 1991: not 1981, not 1971, not

1961, but today. And the context of this time is ominous. The world in which we strive to live as openly lesbian has taken off its ugly white hood to show its sexist, anti-gay, racist, and capitalist face as never before.

When a Ku Klux Klansman can run for the US Senate and get 44 per cent of the vote—the hood is off. When the President of the United States is elected on the heels of an orchestrated racist campaign—the hood is off. Bush campaigned for Helms in North Carolina, vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1990, introduced a Crime Bill that will strip our civil liberties. He speaks in strong support of the anti-choice, anti-woman, anti-abortion movement, and opposes equal rights for women. He has let our brothers and sisters with HIV and AIDS die from negligence, and he engineered a war to win re-election. The hood of evil is off.

A second piece of the context in which we gather is more hopeful. We meet at this lesbian conference at an historic moment in the lesbian and gay movement's history. At the workshops and caucuses I have attended it is clear that the 2,000 of us at this conference are deeply and intimately involved in our movement for freedom. Through our involvement, we are also changing the facts, the politics, and the content of our gay and lesbian organizations.

There is a revolution underway in the lesbian and gay liberation movement. The fact that organizations are developing multicultural plans and dealing with racism on their staffs and boards, and in their programs is a direct result of lesbian-feminist organizing and politics. The fact that the gay and lesbian movement has begun to be multi-issue, that it is pro-choice, that it dares to speak out on the broad social issues of the day (like the war)—is a direct result of lesbian leadership. The fact that the feminist health agenda of the 1970s—disability rights, insurance reform, access to health care, welfare reform—is now on the central burner of the gay and lesbian movement is in part a function of the painful experience of the AIDS crisis, and in part a result of lesbian-feminist analysis and organizing.

These parallel contexts of great danger and great change frame our meeting. As we have seen in this week together, the work we must do—our agenda for action—is large and quite specific! There are two big pieces to our national lesbian agenda: one is movement building, and another is public policy. Put another way, I believe that our lesbian agenda for the 1990s is about organizing and power; it is about taking and making, as Audre Lorde said, "Power out of hatred and destruction."

These are not easy agenda items to move.

Movement Building

The experience of this conference suggests to me that we do not in fact have a national lesbian movement. We have a vital cultural movement, we have a huge amount of talent, we have a lot of grassroots leadership, we have lesbians active in a million projects. But the locus of lesbian community in our cities and towns today remains the same as it was in the 1950s. It remains The Bar, augmented by women's cultural events, the festival network, and local feminist and lesbian bookstores.

We have no national movement, no national newspaper, no national annual gathering place for lesbian activists to meet and talk politics, we have one annual state conference I am aware of—in Texas—and for all the talk of a national lesbian organization let me remind everyone that we have a national lesbian organization that struggles for its daily existence—the National Center for Lesbian Rights. How many of us support this ten-year-old pillar of lesbian advocacy?

The challenges to the re-creation of a lively, open, organized, and unafraid lesbian movement are manifest throughout this National Lesbian Conference. The NLC is a mirror of the current state of the movement. And the mirror shows us several harsh truths.

First truth: We are not one lesbian community, but a series of very splintered communities who have not, in fact, been working with each other at home or at this conference.

Second truth: At this conference, we have demonstrated that we do not trust each other at all; that we refuse to claim the cloak of leadership even when we have it—perhaps because we rightly fear the backlash or ostracism all lesbians who dare say the word leadership fear; that we do not understand that diversity politics is not about knee-jerk reactions or paying lip service but about action and internalizing the message, not about making sure that we have one of each—but learning and accepting that we have each in one.

Third truth: We will never feel entirely included—at this conference or anywhere—because the big social context excludes us completely. At this conference I have met so many fierce, powerful, seasoned, interesting lesbians, and it pains me that any of us might leave this place feeling dejected and hurt, angry and excluded. Let us not do that.

Fourth truth: Developing alternative decision-making processes is wonderful and radical, but all processes must be accountable and take responsibility for their actions.

Fifth truth: We can get so intense and focused on criticizing each other that we forget that we are in this together to change the fucked-up world outside.

We must begin in our own house to put it in order. We must begin by taking a deep collective breath and looking around at the fierce, powerful women that we are. Look at the skills we bring, and let go of perfectionism and purity politics based in fear. Instead enact a courageous and honest politics based in lesbian pride.

It is time for lesbians like me and you to bring our energies back home into our own movement and our own communities. It is time for us to mobilize on the grassroots level FIRST. Every state must have a lesbian conference to encourage involvement by lesbians. Every city and town should have lesbian activist networking breakfasts or potlucks to reconnect us to each other.

Public Policy/Politics

On a political level, in the two years of planning for this conference, I sat through many discussions of "the lesbian political agenda." Lesbians have tried to define lesbian-specific issues. That is not my vision of my lesbian movement's political agenda.

My vision is to claim quite simply the fact that the lesbian agenda is (as it has always been) radical social change. It is the reconstruction of family; it is the re-imagining and claiming of power; it is the reorganization of the economic system; it is the reinforcement of civil rights for all peoples; it is the enactment of laws and the creation of a society that affirms choice; it is the end to the oppression of women; the end to racism; the end to sexism, ableism, homophobia; the protection of our environment.

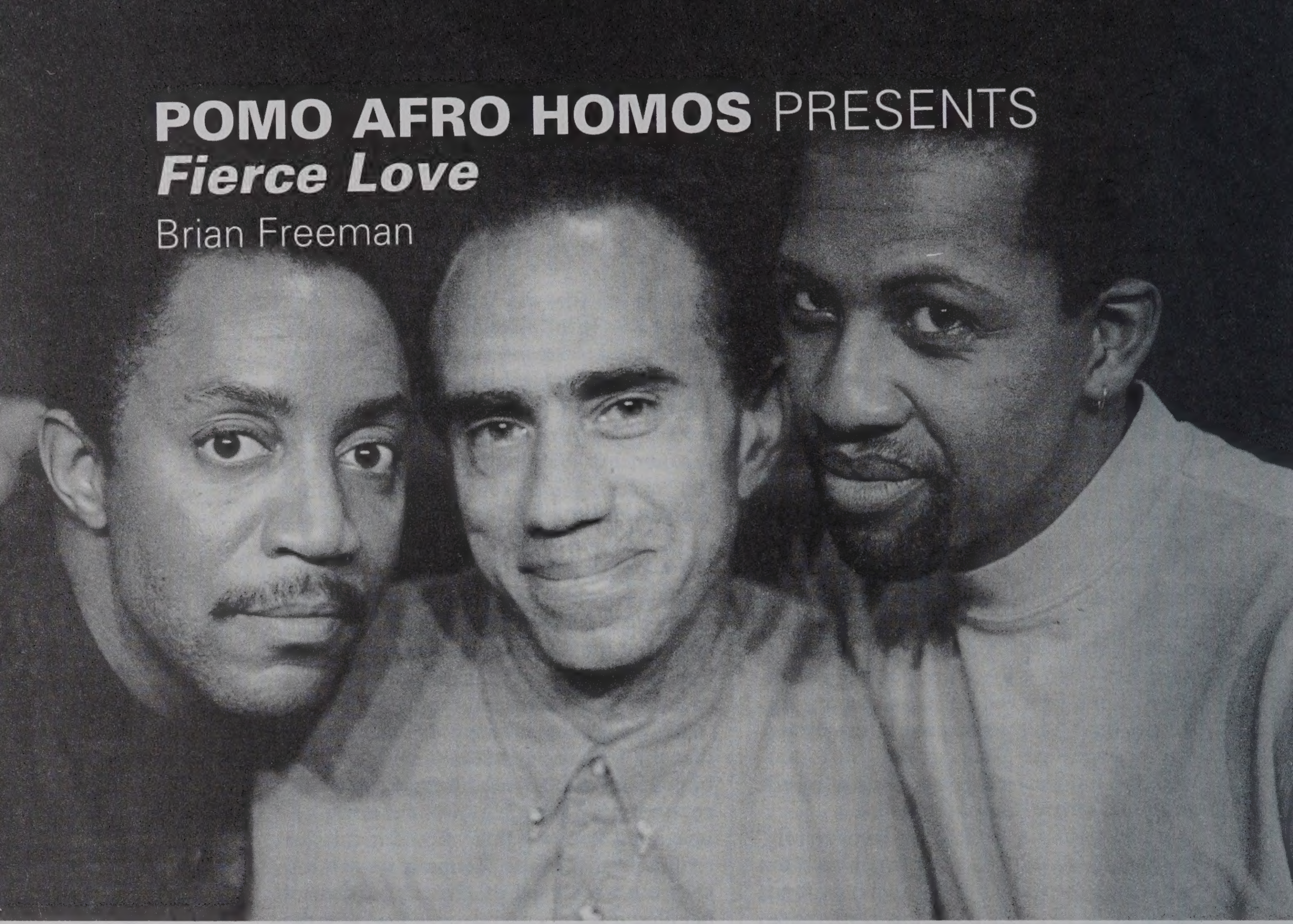
I have no problem claiming all these issues as the lesbian agenda for social change—because that is the truth. Lesbians have a radical social vision—we are the bearers of a truly new world order, not the stench of the same old world odor.

I am not suggesting that all of us drop the work we are doing to focus on this new exclusively lesbian thing called the lesbian agenda. I am suggesting that we continue to do what we are doing, but that we do it as OUT lesbians. That we claim our work as lesbian work, that we be out about who we are wherever we are.

I proudly claim our unique multi-issue perspective. I am proud of my lesbian community's politics of inclusion. I am engaged in my people's liberation. Let us just do it.

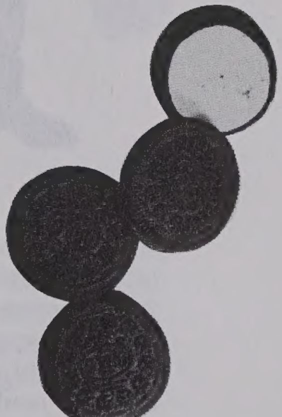
POMO AFRO HOMOS PRESENTS *Fierce Love*

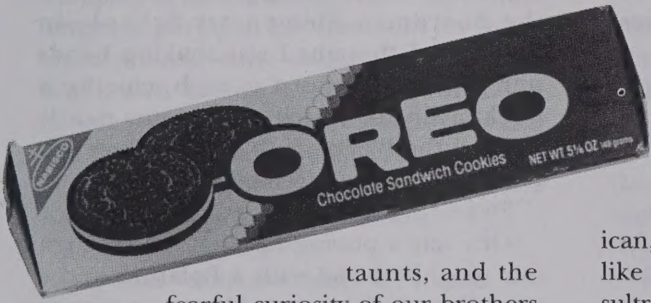
Brian Freeman



On a Tuesday evening in November of 1990 I sat down with Bernard Branner and Eric Gupton to discuss developing an evening of safe sex stories I had irreverently dubbed "Whoppers"—a double play on Black male objectification and how sex stories, like fish tales, get bigger with each telling. A new performance space had opened in the San Francisco's Castro called Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint, and their manager had offered me a late night slot to do "whatever" with. So I thought, "Let's do something Black and sexy" and called Bernard (dancer/poet/fellow Black Gay Men United member/ex-boyfriend turned pal), who called Eric (actor/singer/dancer/composer/what-does-he-not-do?/fierce diva), and we set up this meeting.

After twenty minutes and two sips of double decaf lattes (snap!), we had filled a page with story ideas that encompassed sex, life, love, and so much more. We filed "Whoppers" for another day and took the next month to write *Fierce Love* (fierce being Black Gay slang for "fabulous," and "love" for the ultimate love we as Black gay men sought—a sense of community). I found free rehearsal space at the Western Addition Cultural Center (a Black community center), where we endured no small amount of homophobia from staff members, other performers, and the neighborhood disaffected youth who hung out there. We managed to take the suspicion, the





taunts, and the fearful curiosity of our brothers and sisters in stride—after all, this was about finding our way home—and with every confrontation got that much bolder in our work.

At Josie's on the last Friday in January at 10:45 p.m., (delayed forty-five minutes by the unexpected capacity crowd), we nervously previewed *Fierce Love* to a predominantly Black, gay, and equally nervous audience. But honey, that night, we had church!

My boyfriend, deconstructionist art history professor that he is, dubbed us Pomo Afro Homos (Postmodern, African American, you know the rest), but I think we're like the "girl group" LaBelle. Bernard is a sultry "Sarah," I'm the politico "Nona," and Eric is definitely "Patti" personified. We do our best to "work" everyone's nerves, and hope to be coming soon to a theater near you.

"Sad Young Man" is an autobiographical tale of racial, class and sexual identity. Perhaps it should be subtitled "Blackness." Last year at a garage sale I found this Johnny Mathis record, "To All the Sad Young Men." The lyrics were so queer coded I cried (laughing) when I played it. Listening to it evoked childhood nostalgia.

Fierce Love is a groundbreaking work, but we have many more stories to tell. As we say in the a cappella/gospel prologue, these are some of our stories, and what you're about to read is one of the twelve we present in the show.

SAD YOUNG MAN

The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice, and I was born in the berry, that's Roxbury, the Black section of Boston. My dad, an Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., wannabe, had a small business hanging wallpaper in the new suburban homes of the Jewish folks who were fleeing our neighborhood 'cause too many Black folks were moving in. My mom, a Diahann Carroll wannabe, Mom could pass—that's a Black thing, you wouldn't understand—and worked as a fashion model for Bonwit Teller. We owned our own home, even if it was in a slum. We went to an integrated church, until we realized we could find better music on Sunday mornings.

At age six, I shook the hand of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the steps of the Boardman Elementary School—in Roxbury! I thought I was shaking hands with Jesus, and refused to wash mine for a week, a sin for which my parents nearly slapped the Black off of me. We were the very model of a modern negro family.

[Pulls out family portrait.]

One day a photographer came through our neighborhood with a Polaroid and a pony. For a dollar you could get your picture taken like you were riding "My Friend Flicka." When Mom came out to pay the photographer, he noticed her runway-trained stride and asked her to pose for a project he was working on about model Negro families—that is, pose without the pony. She put on her Jackie Kennedy outfit; she posed. Dad came home, put on his Sunday suit; he posed. I put on my blue, then green, then blue iridescent suit; I posed. He got a set of pictures. We got a set of pictures. Never saw the man again. But six

Curious George

months later, my mom (having gone to night school and become a schoolteacher) was shopping in a school supply store for positive images to pin up in her classroom for Negro History Week—now, this is before we were Black and before we had a month. In between the red hearts for Valentine's Day and the bunnies-with-baskets for Easter she found a set of cardboard cut outs labeled *The New Negro Family,* featuring herself,

[Displays the cutouts.]

my Dad—and somebody *else's* child. For my parents, it was an *Ebony* magazine dream come true. But for me, what a nightmare. It seems some art director in some corporation somewhere had decided I wasn't Black enough to be in my own family!

Humiliated, I retreated into my books and Johnny Mathis records vowing that one day I'd be more than a New Negro, I'd be a New, New Negro. I'd be different.

[Johnny Mathis's record, "All the Sad Young Men" plays.]

Oh Johnny, I'm so sad.

[He pulls a box of Oreos from his bag and tries to swallow one as if it were poison, then throws it away and pulls out a picture of Johnny Mathis and a Curious George Doll.]

"Johnny, George, let's run away together, huh? Just us guys. We'll go somewhere we can be new, new Negroes together. Okay, Johnny? Okay, George?"

[Looking at George.]

"Oh, well, you can come Johnny, but George ... Negroes can sure be monkeys sometimes George, but monkeys can't be Negroes!"

[He puts George away.]

"But you and me Johnny, we'll go somewhere, okay? Do you have 'good hair' Johnny, or is that a process? Should I get a process? Johnny, how come I never see you with girls on TV? I have a secret, Johnny. I love you, Johnny, I love you."

[He's now a teen.]

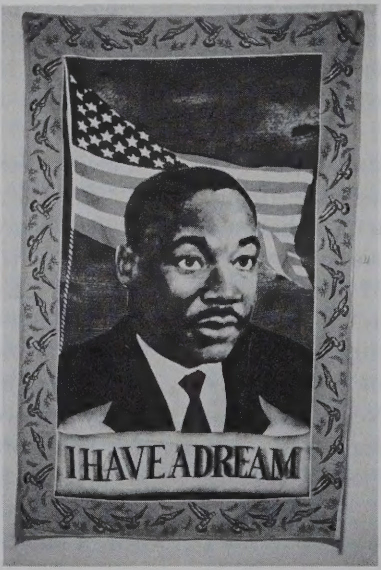
My resourcefulness lands me at an exclusive Latin preparatory school for boys, but my bus ride brings me home to a poor Black neighborhood on fire. As I jam my head with a language that white people haven't spoken in two thousand years, my brother, a Huey Newton wannabe in six-inch platforms and double-breasted "pleather" (pleather? That's plastic leather, we couldn't afford real leather) kicks open my door and announces, "Nigger, either you are part of the solution or part of the problem!" Confused by the contradictions, I do drugs, lots of them, and hang out with hippies—one of whom, Black, seduces me! But one tripped out blow job does not a "homo" make, and I decide to become part of the solution and I invite an Angela Davis wannabe from a girls Latin preparatory school to a Roberta Flack concert. With her ten and my twelve inches of "fro" we are two black dandelions, in a field of a thousand. We can sort of see Roberta through people's necks, but we don't care. We're in love.

[Roberta Flack's "Sweet Bitter Love" plays in the background.]

As I slip my hand through her dashiki, my nose through her coconut scented hair, and my tongue past her cinnamon flavored lips, I think "this is a dream." Someone else's.

[Music ends.]

A professional actor performs at my ivy league college and he's really great and during the post-show discussion I ask all the right questions. After the post-show discussion we talk and he says, "Why don't we go back to my hotel and we can talk about *your* career?" My career? Wow! So on the way we're talking and we get to his hotel. And he says, "Why don't you sit on the bed?" And I'm like, "Wow, these New York actors are really into breaking down barriers." So we're talking, talking, and he says, "You don't mind if I take my pants off?" and I'm like "Wow! Is this 'the method' or what?" So I take my pants off and we're talking, talking and we're no longer talking and, well, uh … he comes in my mouth! I race out the hotel room, back to my dormitory, and vomit in the middle of the quadrangle. A security guard comes over and asks, "Yo, blood, what's up? Something go down wrong?"



Ashamed. Confused. I decide to give heterosexuality one last chance and I invite a sister from the BSU, that's the Black Student Union, that's another Black thing—are you beginning to understand?—I invite her to see *Lady Sings the Blues.* But she let's me know that word is out amongst the brothers in the BSU that I am "that way" and she just couldn't be seen with me. "That way?" Was it my clogs? My hot pants? My glitter tops? I am out and outraged now. I abandon the BSU for the GSU, the Gay Students Union. I run for office, and I put an end to rumors that I'm big fag on campus by becoming officially elected *the* big fag on campus.

[College graduation music plays in the background.]

At my inauguration, I realize the brothers in the BSU are through with me, the sisters in the BSU don't know what to do with me. The white kids in the GSU think they have a real black thing on their hands who they truly do *not* understand—but they will—they all will. 'Cause I remember the words that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke that day, so long ago, on the steps of the Boardman Elementary school, in Roxbury. "Sometimes, I get weary. Sometimes, when I get criticism from other Negroes, oh, I get weary. But I have faith. Yes, I have faith."

[Blackout.]

Fierce Love: Stories from Black Gay Life is written and presented by Pomo Afro Homos (Bernard Branner, Brian Freeman and Eric Gupton). The show will appear at the Dance Theater Workshop in New York from October 3-13, 1991.

MORNINGS ARE LIKE THIS

Janice Gould

for C. Chávez

Each morning I wake up with the sun,
faint light behind the mountain.
It can't be helped.
I want to see how the day will begin.

So I get up.
The house smells like a house.
That is reassuring.
I go to the kitchen
with its old floor and blue walls,
and make my coffee.
I feed the cats.
Then, if it is summer,
I open the doors and windows.
I look out on the world
and there are many things:
the cottonwood, the fence,
a south wind blowing,
the smell of rain.

Maybe I hear the sound of a train
passing a few blocks away,
or a pickup's motor starting
two doors down.
That's the world.

My mind fills with ideas,
and something promises to break open
inside me, as if I could know
all the secrets of life,
my own life,
things that could happen, have happened.
I feel a fierceness in my heart
hovering between anger and sorrow.

REFLECTIONS ON URBAN PUEBLO LIFE

Barbara M. Cameron

I've been reflecting recently on who I am as a Lakota and how I got to be in San Francisco, far away from my home and my Lakota family. I want to begin by sharing what I've been thinking about, what I remember, what I miss, and what I can never have again. And also what helps me survive in this urban pueblo.

I wish San Francisco had a Native American restaurant because I savor the memory of a soup. It's made from wild, dried turnips and corn—the taste is unbelievably delicious. I felt very happy whenever my grandmother made it. The *wanagi* (ghost) soup was not only wonderful tasting, but there was anticipation in wondering and waiting to see which spirits would visit me at the table or outside when I was playing.

I cut my hair this week, so I thought about my third grade picture. I used to stare at it, study it, trying to understand why I had an awful-looking haircut. I'd look at that picture and ask, "Why did my mom get me such a horrible haircut?" I looked so strange without my braids.

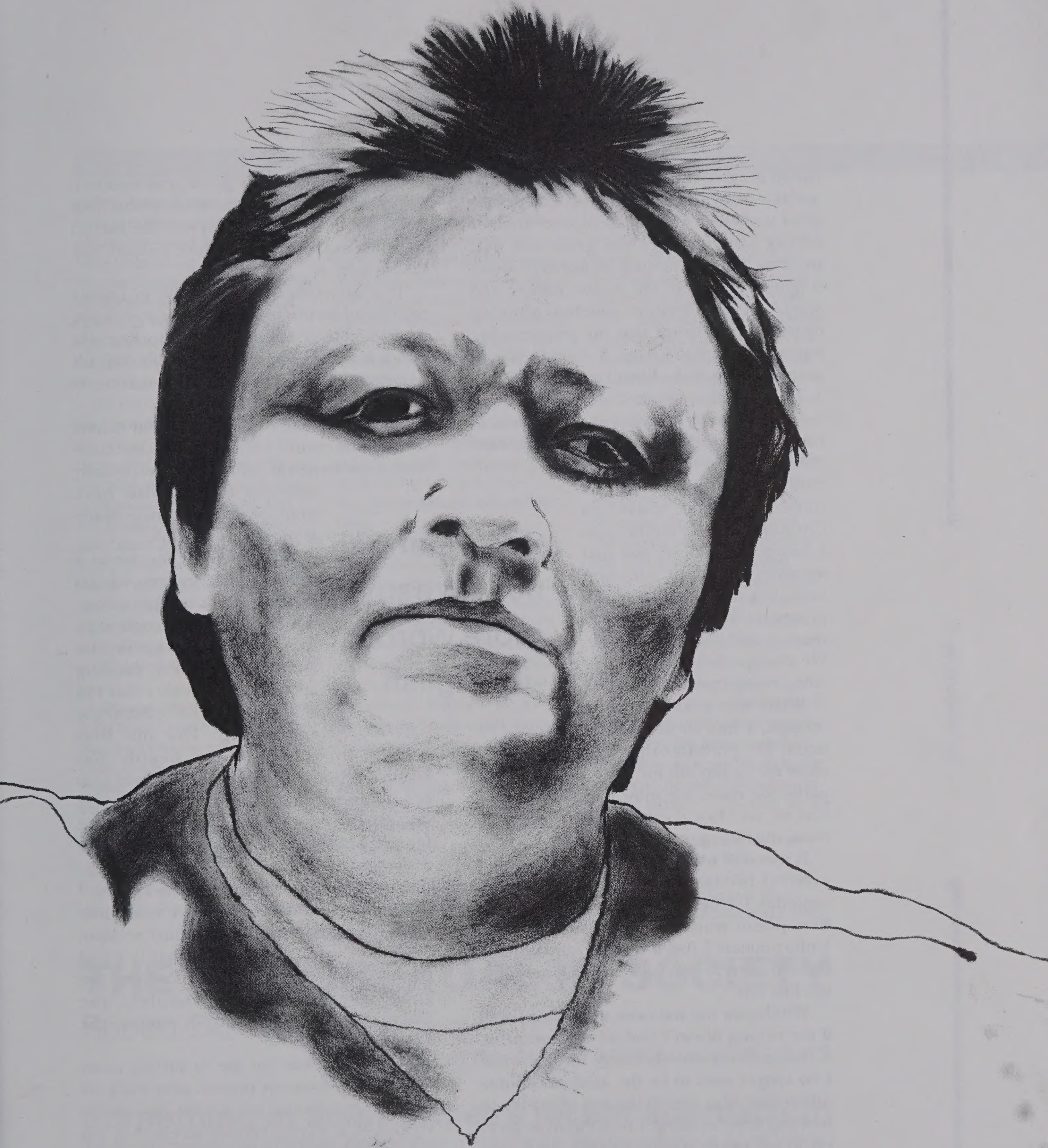
One summer when I was visiting my mom and my grandparents, I had the opportunity to ask about this haircut. As we were reminiscing over my childhood, my mom went downstairs and returned with several boxes of my childhood items. We came across a photo album with those braids inside. So I asked her, "Mom, why did you cut off my braids?" She looked at me, her eyes growing very large like they do when she is surprised or about to become annoyed. I thought, "Uh oh, I better change the subject." My mom said, "Barbara, *you* cut off your braids. You had a temper tantrum, ran and got your grandmother's scissors and cut them off, and also cut off patches of hair on top of your head."

As soon as she finished, the memory slowly returned. I definitely remember my mom's eyes getting big, my auntie laughing, and my grandmother saying it was my mom's fault that I had a temper tantrum.

On rare occasions, my grandparents ate prairie dog, which was a traditional activity for them. But I made certain that cold cuts were available for me to eat because I could not bring myself to eat prairie dogs, especially after seeing a Disney special on prairie animals. Of course, my uncle would tease me that I was a *wasicula* (white person) for eating cold cuts instead of prairie dogs.

I began to be aware that I was not a typical Lakota. I didn't necessarily like all of our traditional foods and I wanted many things which did not exist on the reservation.

Sometimes we went into town by wagon and team, even though my grandparents had a car. Our tractor, also, often sat and



Barbara Cameron by William Samios

rusted because my grandfather preferred to use the team to cut hay. Fresh cut prairie grass is a sweet smell. I spent one summer sitting outside after the grass was cut, smelling it and listening to Robert Goulet singing, "Fly me to the moon, Jupiter and Mars." The combination somehow provided contentment, except that my grandmother was unhappy that I liked Robert Goulet. I pointed out that she liked Lawrence Welk.

I was raised as a Catholic, which I enjoyed very little except near Easter when the statues were covered in purple cloth. It seemed that mysterious events may have been occurring under the cloth. I also liked midnight mass on Christmas Eve. My mother and I sometimes told my dad that we were attending midnight mass, but my mom visited the protestant Avon lady who lived next to the Catholic church. We shopped for my mom's colognes and powders instead.

With my grandparents, though, I had to attend the mass. My grandmother did allow me to slip out for a few minutes. One particular mass, the snow was gently falling and my very first poem was about midnight mass, the falling snow, and the stars.

It was very exciting to write something. I saved it for many years because I knew someday I'd be a famous writer and that first poem would be a museum piece. Unfortunately I had a temper tantrum and burned several years of writing, including the first one.

Writing for me has been a salvation, even if the writing doesn't find its way into print. A recent fundamental change for me is that I no longer want to be the kind of community activist who spends the rest of my life in meeting after meeting. I don't want to go to my grave never having written the Great Native American novel. It doesn't necessarily have to be published. It can be one book passed from person to person to read.

Writing is a way to feel whole, to have conversations with my great-grandmother, my grandmother and grandfather who have gone on. It is a way to survive the racism and insensitivity of the white lesbian/gay community.

It is sometimes hard to think in Lakota words and terms, to have Lakota memories, and then to translate them into English, which is a language I find especially difficult to communicate in. Everything needs many more words in English.

What binds me with other Indian writers is that this country is ours. We have common experiences as Indians. We share many sorrows but we also have grandparents who have made those sorrows shrink.

Everything needs many more words in English.

What is hard for me as a writer is that for many years now, my focus has been community activism through organizations, working in the Democratic party, fooling around with the idea that I'm a "leader" in the lesbian/gay community. I've put that aside as my health has become tenuous. I feel that after four cancer biopsies I need to work to realize my dreams. But however it is that I write, I need for the process to be different from other writers.

I need noise, not quiet, when I write. I think that eventually I will need to live in a place where there are four distinct seasons. I'd like to write a screenplay that is a real *Dances with Wolves*, where the Pawnees are good, the Lakota are complex, the Cheyenne are smart, and, of course, the Crow are still bad.

Writing is a way for me to survive as an Indian, away from my prairie, away from my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, my mom. Writing is a way to release stress that has been alive for many Indians since the 1800s. We carry the hurt and anger from grandparents who carried it from their grandparents. Writing is a way to touch trees, to smell prairie grass, to hear thunder, to eat soup.

Robert Duncan was one of the most prominent American poets of the post-World War II period. His pathbreaking 1944 essay "The Homosexual in Society" was possibly the first in the United States to address how gay men might fight for their liberation in the context of liberal/ left politics as "out" homosexuals.

In 1941, Duncan was drafted, and served for a short time at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He found the regimentation of army life unbearable, openly declared his homosexuality to his officers, and was kicked out with an undesirable "blue" discharge. By the time Pearl Harbor was bombed, the war already had forced him to ask—and act on—a deeply personal yet political question: What is the role of the homosexual artist/anarchist in a nation at war?

Duncan found a forum for his ideas when Dwight Macdonald launched what he called a democratic and humanist magazine, *Politics*, in 1944. Publication of the essay was a daring act for editor as well as author. Macdonald initially balked when Duncan insisted on signing his name to the piece, but finally agreed, making this essay one of the few signed coming-out pieces to be published in the United States before the 1950s.

Duncan's language reflects the liberal politics and gay slang of his time, and anticipates ideas that emerged more fully in the following decades. He placed the word "queer" in quotes to reflect how it was used pejoratively by nonhomosexuals, and offered "gay" as an alternative. He also used the terms "family" and "community" in reference to the gay community, words and concepts rarely used in the homophile movement before the 1960s.

Although Duncan received letters of thanks for his brave public statement, he was also attacked. One editor wondered if Duncan and other "homosexual poets" had all along "symbolized their abnormality" in their work "and palmed it off on innocent 'little magazines.'" Parker Tyler, defending gay intellectuals, wrote to *Politics* that he knew of no cult or clique of homosexual superiority, and that Duncan's article reflected his guilt and revulsion from his "own milieu" and as a result he was not a "fit partisan" for any homosexual "social program."

This essay began to define some of the outlines and conflicts of a gay political movement that in 1944 (when Duncan was just twenty-five years old) was at best a figment of his imagination. His determination to sign his name and to criticize his own literary closet suggested that a homosexual politics might be based on the personal act of coming out. His identification of the conflict between creating a homosexual politics based on difference rather than on commonality with other people anticipated divisions that would arise in the gay movement, beginning with the Mattachine Society in the early 1950s and continuing to Queer Nation today. The questions he raised about the benefits and liabilities of gay ghetto culture placed homosexuals [although white and male by implication] alongside "Negroes" and Jews as people fighting for human liberation.

Although lesbian and gay politics have emerged and changed radically in the forty-seven years since Duncan wrote his essay, the problems he raised then remain critical today. —*Allan Bérubé*

Biographical material is based on Ekbert Faas, Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society *(Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983).*

THE HOMOSEXUAL IN SOCIETY

Robert Duncan

Reprinted from the August 1944 Issue of POLITICS

Something in James Agee's recent approach to the Negro pseudo-folk (*Partisan Review*, Spring 1944) is the background of the notes which I propose in discussing yet another group whose only salvation is in the struggle of all humanity for freedom and individual integrity; who have suffered in modern society persecution, excommunication; and whose "intellectuals," whose most articulate members, have been willing to desert that primary struggle, to beg, to gain at the price, if need be, of any sort of prostitution, privilege for themselves, however ephemeral; who have been willing, rather than to struggle toward self-recognition, to sell their product, to convert their deepest feelings into marketable oddities and sentimentalities.

Although in private conversation, at every table, at every editorial board, one *knows* that a great body of modern art is cheated by what almost amounts to a homosexual cult; although hostile critics have opened fire in a constant attack as rabid as the attack of Southern senators upon "niggers"; critics who might possibly view the homosexual with a more humane eye seem agreed that it is better that nothing be said. Pressed to the point, they may either, as in the case of such an undeniable homosexual as Hart Crane, contend that they are great despite their "perversion"*—much as my mother used to say how much better a poet Poe would have been had he not taken dope; or where it is possible they have attempted to deny the role of the homosexual in modern art, the usual reply to unprincipled critics like Craven and Benton in painting being to assert that modern artists have not been homosexual. (Much as PM goes to great length to prove that none of the Communist leaders have been Jews—as if, if *all* the leaders were Jews, it would be that that would make the party suspect.)

But one cannot, in face of the approach taken to their own problem by homosexuals, place any weight of criticism upon the liberal body of critics. For there are Negroes who have joined openly in the struggle for human freedom, made articulate that their struggle against racial prejudice is part of the struggle for all; while there are Jews who have sought no special privilege of recognition for themselves as Jews, but have fought for *human* recognition and rights. But there is in the modern scene no homosexual who has been willing to take in his own persecution a battlefront toward human freedom. Almost co-incident with the first declarations for homosexual rights was the growth of a cult of homosexual superiority to the human race; the cultivation of a secret language, the *camp*, a tone and a vocabulary that is loaded with contempt for the human. They have gone beyond, let us say, Christianity, in excluding the pagan world.

Outside the ghetto the word "goy" disappears, wavers and dwindles in the Jew's vocabulary. But in what one would believe the most radical, the most enlightened "queer" circles the word "jam" remains, designating all who are not homosexual, filled with an unwavering hostility and fear, gathering an incredible force of exclusion and blindness. It is hard (for all the sympathy which I can bring to bear) to say that this cult plays any other than an evil role in society.

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*Critics of Crane, for instance, consider that his homosexuality is the cause of his inability to adjust to society. Another school feels that inability to adjust to society causes homosexuality. What seems fairly obvious is that what society frustrated in Crane was his effort to write poetry and to write what he wanted to in the way he wanted to. He might well have adjusted his homosexual desires within society as many have done by "living a lie." It was his desire for truth that society condemned.

But names cannot be named. I cannot, like Agee, name the nasty little midgets, the entrepreneurs of this vicious market, the pimps of this special product. There are critics whose cynical, back-biting joke upon their audience is no other than this secret special superiority; there are poets whose nostalgic picture of special worth in suffering, sensitivity and magical quality is no other than this intermediate "sixth sense"; there are new cult leaders whose special divinity, whose supernatural and visionary claim is no other than this mystery of sex. The law has declared homosexuality secret, non-human, unnatural (and why not then supernatural?). The law itself sees in it a crime, not in the sense that murder, thievery, seduction of children or rape is seen as a crime—but in an occult sense. In the recent Lonergan case it was clear that murder was a *human* crime, but homosexuality was non-human. It was not a crime against man but a crime against "the way of nature," as defined in the Christian religion, a crime against God." ** It was lit up and given an awful and lurid attraction such as witchcraft (I can think of no other immediate example) was given in its time. Like early witches, the homosexual propagandists have rejected any struggle toward recognition in social equality and, far from seeking to undermine the popular superstition, have accepted the charge of Demonism. Sensing the fear in society that is generated in ignorance of their nature, they have sought not to bring about an understanding, to assert their equality and their common aims with mankind, but they have sought to profit by that fear and ignorance, to become witch doctors in the modern chaos.

To go about this they have had to cover with mystery, to obscure, the work of all these who have viewed homosexuality as but one of the many facets, one of the many eyes through which the human being may see and who, admitting through which eye they saw, have had primarily in mind as they wrote (as Melville, Proust, or Crane had) mankind and its liberation. For these great early artists their humanity was the source, the sole source, of their work. Thus in *Remembrance of Things Past* Charlus is not seen as the special disintegration of a homosexual but as a human being in disintegration, and the forces that lead to that disintegration, the forces of pride, self-humiliation in love, jealousy, are not special forces but common to all men and women. Thus in Melville, though in *Billy Budd* it is clear that the conflict is homosexual, the forces that make for that

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** "Just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in inverts and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination." *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* Proust.

conflict, the guilt in passion, the hostility rising from subconscious sources, and the sudden recognition of these forces as it comes to Vere in that story; these are forces which are universal, which rise in other contexts, which in Melville's work have risen in other contexts.

It is, however, the body of Crane that has been most ravaged by these modern ghouls and, once ravaged, stuck up cult-wise in the mystic light of their special cemetery literature. The live body of Crane is there, inviolate; but in the window display of modern poetry, of so many special critics and devotees, is a painted mummy, deep sea green. One may tiptoe by, as the visitors to Lenin's tomb tiptoe by and, once outside, find themselves in a world in his name that has celebrated the defeat of all that he was devoted to. One need only point out in all the homosexual imagery of Crane, in the longing and vision of love, the absence, for instance, of the "English" specialty, the private world of boys' schools and isolate sufferings that has been converted into the poet's intangible "nobility," into the private*** sensibility that colors so much of modern writing. Where the Zionists of homosexuality have laid claim to a Palestine of their own, asserting in their miseries their nationality, Crane's suffering, his rebellion, and his love are sources of poetry for him not because they are what make him different from, superior to, mankind, but because he saw in them his link with mankind; he saw in them his sharing in universal human experience.

What can one do in the face of this, both those critics and artists, not homosexuals, who, however, are primarily concerned with all inhumanities, all forces of convention and law that impose a tyranny upon man, and those critics and artists who, as homosexuals, must face in their own lives both the hostility of society in that they are "queer" and the hostility of the homosexual cult of superiority in that they are human?

For the first group the starting point is clear, that they must recognize homosexuals as equals and as equals allow them neither more nor less than can be allowed any human being. For the second group the starting point is more difficult; the problem is more treacherous.

In the face of the hostility of society which I risk in making even the acknowledgement explicitly in this statement, in the face of the "crime" of my own feelings, in the past I publicized those feelings as private and made no stand for their recognition but tried to sell them disguised, for instance, as conflicts rising from mystical sources. I colored and perverted simple and direct emotions and realizations into a mysterious realm, a mysterious relation to society. Faced by the inhumanities of society I did not seek a solution in humanity but turned to a sec-

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***By *private* I in no sense mean *personal*.

ond out-cast society as inhumane as the first. I joined those who, while they allowed for my sexual nature, allowed for so little of the moral, the sensible and creative direction which all of living should reflect. They offered a family, outrageous as it was, a community in which one was not condemned for one's homosexuality, but it was necessary there for one to desert one's humanity for which one would be suspect, "out of key." In drawing rooms and in little magazines I celebrated the cult with a sense of sanctuary such as a Medieval Jew must have found in the ghetto; my voice taking on the modulations which tell of the capitulation to snobbery and the removal from the "common sort"; my poetry exhibiting the objects made divine and tyrannical as the Catholic church has made bones of saints, and bread and wine, tyrannical.

After an evening at one of those salons where the whole atmosphere was one of suggestion and celebration, I returned recently experiencing again the after-shock, the desolate feeling of wrongness, remembering in my own voice and gestures the rehearsal of unfeeling. Alone, not only I, but, I felt, the others who had appeared as I did so mocking, so superior to feeling, had known, knew still, those troubled emotions, the deep and integral longings that we as human beings feel, holding us from violate action by the powerful sense of humanity that is their source, longings that lead us to love, to envision a creative life. "Towards something far," as Hart Crane wrote, "now farther away than ever."

Among those who should understand those emotions which society condemned, one found that the group language did not allow for any feeling at all other than this self-ridicule, this gaiety (it is significant that the homosexual's word for his own kind is "gay"), a wave surging forward, breaking into laughter and then receding, leaving a wake of disillusionment, a disbelief that extended to one-self, to life itself. What then, disowning this career, can one turn to?

What I think can be asserted as a starting point is that only one devotion can be held by a human being as a creative life and expression, and that is a devotion to human freedom, toward the liberation of human love, human conflicts, human aspirations. To do this one must disown *all* the special groups (nations, religions, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance. To hold this devotion every written word, every spoken word, every action, every purpose, must be examined and considered. The old fears, the old specialties will be there, mocking and tempting; the old protective associations will be there, offering for a surrender of one's humanity congratulations upon one's special nature and value. It must be always recognized that the others, those who have surrendered their humanity, are not less than oneself. It must be always remembered that one's own honesty, one's battle against the inhumanity of his own group (be it against patriotism, against bigotry, against, in this specific case, the homosexual cult) is a battle that cannot be won in the immediate scene. The forces of inhumanity are overwhelming, but only one's continued opposition can make any other order possible, can give an added strength for all those who desire freedom and equality to break at last those fetters that seem now so unbreakable.

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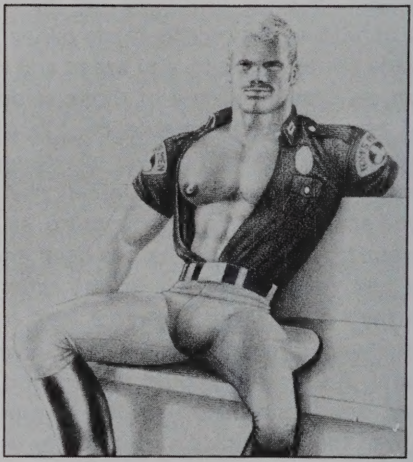

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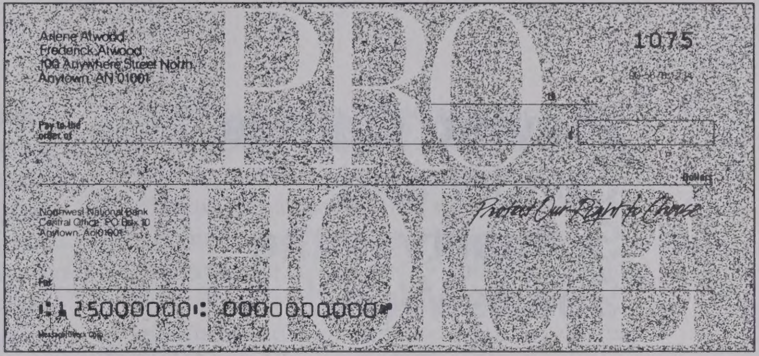

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Playing Games
Gender and Sexuality in the Sports World

Nancy Boutilier

***The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex* by Brian Pronger,** St. Martin's Press, NY, 1990.

***Are We Winning Yet?: How Women Are Changing Sports and Sports Are Changing Women* by Mariah Burton Nelson,** Random House, NY, 1991.

Much of what I know about gender expectations, I learned in that neutered limbo called tomboyhood. Like many women who participate in sports, I felt pressured to compensate for my ability to "throw like a boy" by proving my femininity. Society's definitions of masculinity and femininity, and the impulse to clearly differentiate between them, shape the field of athletics and prove to be particularly problematic for lesbians and gay men. This argument is central to two recent books about the world of sports.

Mariah Burton Nelson's *Are We Winning Yet? How Women Are Changing Sports and Sports Are Changing Women,* explores the competing demands on female athletes who trespass in the "masculine" domain of athletics. "You can't be a female athlete without addressing questions of femininity, sexuality, fear, power, freedom, and just how good you are compared with men," writes Nelson.

The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex, by Brian Pronger, made me recognize that while I share a sense of estrangement with the gay men Pronger interviewed, I have never thought of my athleticism as particularly masculine. As I read the book, I saw myself in the gay man who realized that he had used sports "as a way to avoid his sexuality." But I would never have imagined the experience of the man who quit his high school wrestling team because he often got hard, and came, while wrestling.

Read together, Nelson and Pronger confirm that femininity and masculinity are two sides of the same gender coin. But they also reveal that an examination of one side does not ensure an understanding of the other. Gay men and lesbians experience sports differently because men and women experience gendered institutions so differently. The participation of a man in a masculine institution is a fulfillment of a gender expectation—an athletic man can use masculinity to mask his homosexuality. A woman's participation in that institution, however, is a violation of a gender code—she has to counterbalance her athleticism to prove herself feminine.

Pronger's analysis transcends the immediate subject of gay men and sports when he suggests that "homosexuality undermines, in a positive way, the most important myth of our culture." That myth is, of course, the gender myth, the sociocultural invention that divides power unevenly between men and women by endowing "the relatively minor biological differences between males and females with major social significance."

Gay men face the paradox of having an interest in both maintaining the gender myth and destroying it, according to Pronger. Their interest usually "falls somewhere between a total acceptance of masculine power and a total rejection of it," he says.

Because gay men are attracted to men, and often masculinity, gay culture tends to appropriate masculine signs and make explicit their homoerotic potential. Consider jock porn films. In a typical scene from such a film, men touch, hold, and grab one another in the context of athletics. In a convincing show of orthodox masculinity, they struggle and then continue wrestling, in erotic embrace. Like male homoeroticism, sports competition involves both cooperation and struggle.

Pronger's discussion of the homoerotic potential inherent in sport helps to make sense of all those flagrantly heterosexist and sexist television commercials that play during time-outs and between halves. Why are commercials and game sidelines adorned with women in skimpy outfits, if not (at least in part) to obscure the homoeroticism of sports? Pom-pom girls offer male spectators some reassurance that their excitement is the result of cheerleaders on the sidelines and "bimbos" in the beer ads—and not of hot, writhing male bodies.

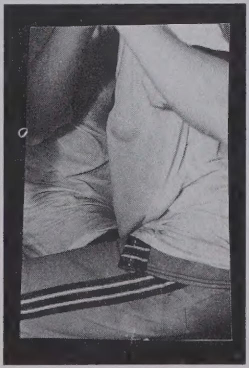
Although gay male sports culture may symbolically undermine the gender myth by responding ironically to what Pronger terms the "paradox" of homosexuality, it does not necessarily address the sexism that is supported by the gender myth. Women are excluded from the world of gay male sports culture, as from the world of jack-off clubs. While gay men may exclude women in order to keep their arena of masculinity sexualized, straight men seem to believe that they can keep sports *nonsexual* by excluding women.

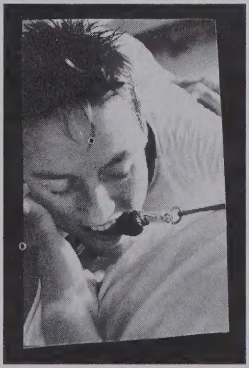
If men can imagine a world of sports without women, can women imagine (and do they want?) a sports world without men? The recent history of women's sports helps to illustrate the role of sexism and homophobia in maintaining the unequal power distribution between men and women in the sports world.

Money may be the primary reason it remains impossible to imagine a separate world of women's sports. The value our society places on male approval becomes apparent when women try to take the fields. Both economic factors and male approval control the newly created professional women's basketball league, with its players in skin-tight lycra uniforms playing on a lowered basket.

Mariah Nelson predicts failure for the league and, in a recent interview, said of the men running the show, "They're so confused. On one hand they're trying to make us look like men, thinking it will sell only if we can slam dunk. On the other hand, they're playing up the sexualization of women. They don't know we can just be athletes. They have gender on their minds so much that they can't see an athlete when they look at a woman; they just see female, and that really throws them."

Nelson's own experience in the Women's Basketball League of the early 1980s helps to explain her cynicism. When she played for the California Dreams, training included a trip to charm school (which was also required for many of the women playing in





Photography by Laura Trent

the women's professional baseball team that lasted from 1943 to 1954). She was put on waivers without explanation by the San Francisco Pioneers and later learned that a local reporter had seen her in San Francisco's Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade and passed the word on to the front office.

Although it would have made for interesting reading, Nelson decided not to focus on herself in the book. She lets the stories of other athletes reveal the problems facing women in the sports world, including the way homophobia is used to control women.

In the chapter "A Silence So Loud It Screams," Nelson profiles a professional golfer who lives a contradictory and closeted life on the golf tour. The golfer hides her name, calls Martina Navratilova "militant," yet marries her female lover in the Metropolitan Community Church. As in every chapter of the book, Nelson highlights issues that extend beyond the lives of individual athletes. Since athletic women have ventured out of feminine territory, she tells us, the burden of proof is on them to prove themselves feminine, which of course includes being attracted and subservient to men. Any woman who challenges any male in the world of women's sports, Nelson argues, puts herself at risk of accusations of lesbianism.

Men's sports continues to successfully keep its doors closed to women, but women's sports is becoming increasingly influenced by men. Sometimes that influence has resulted in the loss of power for women, as when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) began televising women's championships in 1982. The rising influence of the NCAA led to the demise of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, the body of female teachers, coaches, administrators, and students that until that time made decisions about women's college sports.

Nelson also makes forays into the world of gay sports by comparing what she calls the "military" model of sport (in which power is seen as power-over) used in professional leagues and standard coaching practice, to the "partnership" model (in which power is seen as power-to) used more often by women, particularly in the gay sports arena. The Gay Games, according to Nelson, are an example of a partnership model of sport in action, which is "deliberately inclusive ... of all ages, skill levels, and sexual orientations."

While reading Nelson and Pronger together allows one to see how much gay and lesbian athletes have in common, recognizing our differences may be crucial to the success of efforts to unify the gay and lesbian sports communities. When a gay man claims his right to a place in the athletic arena, he may either be claiming it in defiance of the gender myth, staking a claim to so-called "masculine" endeavors despite his sexual preference, or he may be asserting his maleness, leaving the sexist order intact.

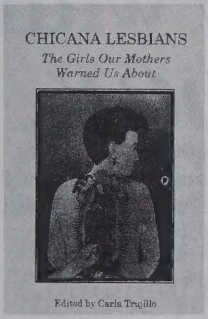
Because out lesbians in the gay community don't fear accusations of lesbianism, as closeted lesbians and straight women often do in mainstream sports, lesbians have been able to exert a far greater influence upon gay athletics than women do in the mainstream. As a result, the partnership competition model of competition finds widespread acceptance in the gay sports world. And some gay men, who felt excluded from sports as boys, are finding this cooperative model far more welcoming than the military model of their youth.

Nelson concludes that "most women aren't choosing between coed and single-sex sports, or between ladylike and manlike behavior; instead, they're developing a sporting ethic." The same might be said of many gay and lesbian athletes. The partnership model of sports is more consistent with the current politics of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement because it is empowering, inclusive, and cooperative. If the partnership model, as Nelson defines it, can be perfected within the world of queer sports, gay sports communities across the country may find themselves becoming an example that others seek to replicate.

Louise J. Kaplan, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991)

For Kaplan "perversions" are not the usual forms of sexually deviant behavior, but neurotic manifestations of gender norms. Thus, male perversions caricature masculine ideals of virility, while female perversions parody feminine models of submission and purity. She discusses such behavior as kleptomania, women who love too much, homovestism ("excessive" dressing in the stereotyped feminine fashions), and anorexia. Kaplan is not always convincing, but *Female Perversions* offers a fascinating and provocative essay on the crippling effects of gender norms.

Carla Trujillo, Ed., *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1991)



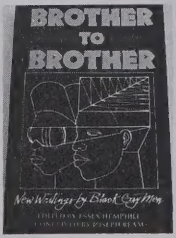
A groundbreaking compilation of work that examines the role Chicana lesbians play in challenging and shaping the Chicano political, social and ethnic identity. The anthology features work by both Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, and manages to balance heavily theoretical and academic material with lighter explorations through fiction and poetry.

Lilian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

LILLIAN FADERMAN
ODD GIRLS AND TWILIGHT LOVERS
A HISTORY OF LESBIAN LIFE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

Faderman's earlier book, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, was deeply influenced by lesbian-feminist definitions of the lesbian identity. In it, she presented a history of romantic friendship while completely neglecting the world of butch-femme and passing women. This book covers a wider range of lesbian life. It's great to have a comprehensive history like this. One disappointing thing is Faderman's use of some material without attribution.

Essex Hemphill, Editor, Conceived by Joseph Beam, *Brother to Brother, New Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston: Alyson, 1991)



Another rich and rewarding survey (following up Joseph Beam's pathbreaking 1986 anthology *In the Life)* of the writing and thought of Black gay men. Hemphill's introduction is a particularly powerful statement of the themes that the other authors take up in poetry, fiction, and essays. As in most anthologies the quality in *Brother to Brother* varies a great deal. This collection offers many personal essays, poems, and more analytic essays on Black male sexuality, on the impact of AIDS, on the relationship of Black gay men to African American culture.

Amy Scholder and Ira Silverberg, Editors, *High Risk: An Anthology* (New York: New American Library, 1991)

This provocative collection has some great pieces—especially Dorothy Allison's "Private Rituals." John Preston's essay on forbidden thoughts is one of the best things that he has ever done, and the essays by Bob Flanagan and Ana Maria Simo are quite powerful.

Bo Huston, *Remember Me* (New York: Amethyst Press, 1991)

This novel is written in the strong, almost hallucinatory voice of a nameless gay man with AIDS.

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Through the lens of the narrator's deep friendship with his childhood friend, Charlotte, who is herself sick with some nameless and debilitating illness, Huston explores the twilight zone where living with a disease means neither fully living nor immediate death. The narrator slowly collects the stories of the people around him in an effort to transcend his state of being.

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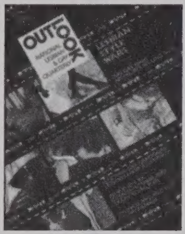

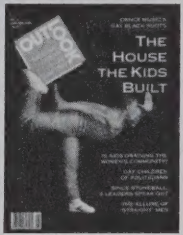

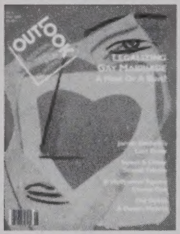

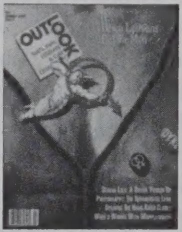

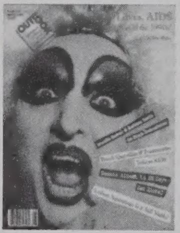

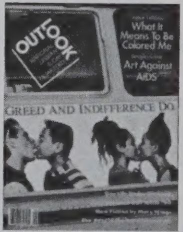

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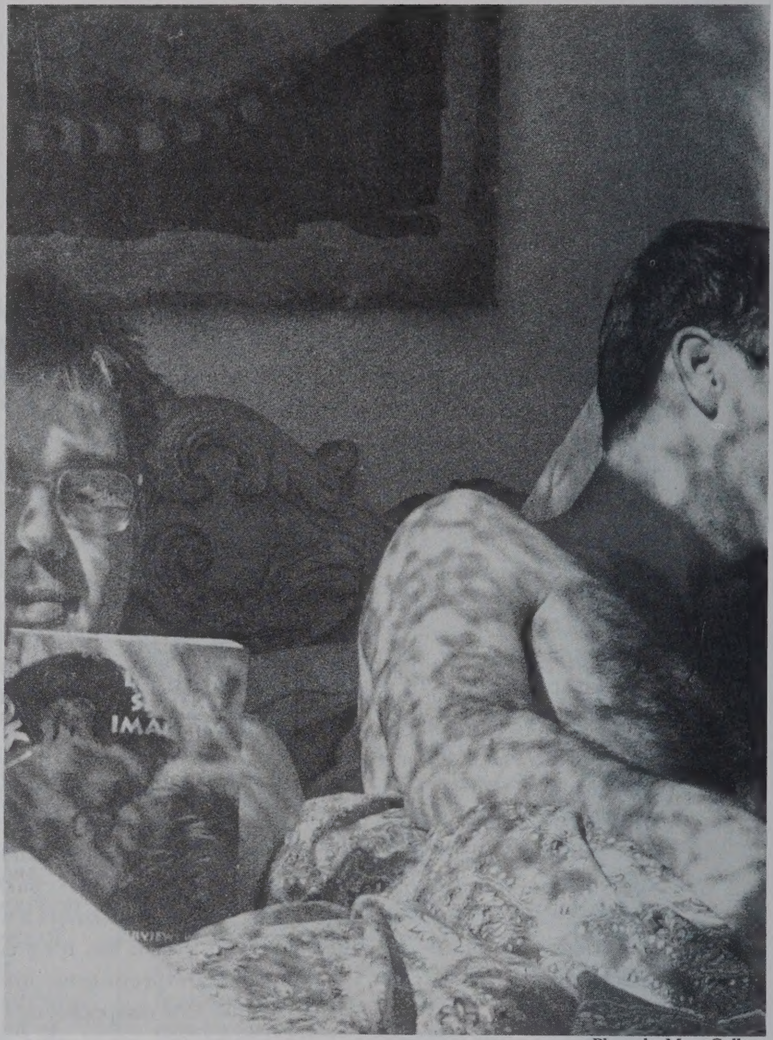

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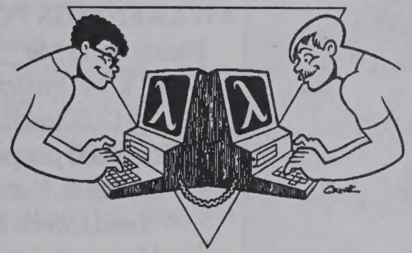

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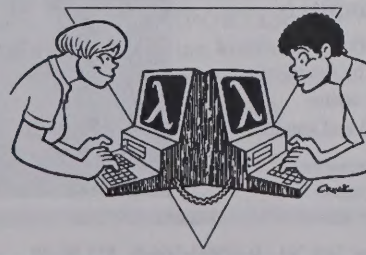

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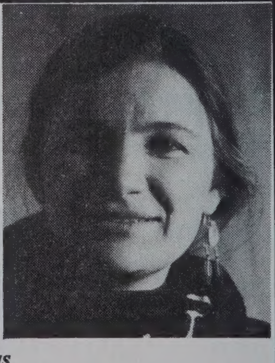

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Bonita Barlow is an artist currenty living in the beachside village of Bolinas in Northern California.

Alison Bechdel ("The Post Mortem") pens the popular comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For." She lives in Vermont.

Rüdiger Busto ("When the Spirit Moves Us") teaches a class on ethnicity and religion at Stanford and is an editor at *OUT/LOOK.*

Nancy Boutilier ("Playing Games") played basketball, softball, and lacrosse and rowed crew at Harvard and Radcliffe before becoming a high school English teacher and coach. She writes for the *Bay Area Reporter* and *The Sphere.*

Barbara Cameron ("Reflections on Urban Pueblo Life") is an American Indian, parent, and community activist; her most recent essay, "Wild Turnips," was published in *A Gathering of Spirit* (Firebrand Books).

Phyllis Christopher is a San Francisco-based photographer.

Gil Cuadros ("Unprotected") was born in Los Angeles. He studied at East L.A. College and Pasadena Community College and has been published in *The James White Review.*

John Dibelka ("Long Distance") is a contributing editor to and columnist for *Bear* magazine who lives and tends bar in San Diego.

Robert Duncan ("The Homosexual in Society") lived from 1919 to 1986. He was one of the most prominent American poets in the post-WWII period. His biography, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet as Homosexual in Society,* is available from Black Sparrow Press.

Jeffrey Escoffier ("Arguing in Public") is the publisher of *OUT/LOOK.*

Brian Freeman ("Fierce Love") is a playwright/performer who spent eight years as member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe (one of America's pioneer political theaters); he was the associate producer of the acclaimed video *Tongues Untied.*

Janice Gould ("Mornings Are Like This") is a poet who lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Lisa Hall ("Chock Full of Irony") is a doctoral candidate in Ethnic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley. She works at the Aunt Lute Foundation.

Kelly Gabriel Lee ("When the Spirit Moves Us") is a student at the California Institute of Integral Studies, pursuing a Ph.D. in inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural historical studies, and is General Manager at *OUT/LOOK.*

Andrea Lewis ("Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?") is a research editor at *Mother Jones* magazine. Her interview with Beverly Smith appeared in *The Black Women's Health Book* (Seal Press).

Isa Massu is a photographer currently working with computer enhanced photographic imagery. She was born in Paris, France.

Lesléa Newman ("Love Signs") is the author of seven books including *A Letter to Harvey Milk.* Her book of poems entitled *Sweet Dark Places* is scheduled to be published by Lavender Press in the fall.

Walt Odets, Ph.D ("The Secret Epidemic") is a psychotherapist in private practice in Oakland, CA.

Monica Palacios ("Personality Fabulosa") is a Los Angeles-based writer/performer. She is currently touring her one-woman show "Latin Lezbo Comic."

William Samios is an artist whose third-floor studio in the Castro provides inspiration for his paintings on the themes of sexuality, health, and death.

Darrell g.h. Schramm ("Responsibility") is a poet whose work has appeared in over three dozen magazines including *Midwest Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly,* and *Bay Windows.*

Blake Sorrell has been photographing humans for years with work appearing in *FAD, Fortune, Parenting,* and *The Sphere.*

Laura Trent is a San Francisco-based writer and photographer working in the field of law.

Urvashi Vaid ("Let's Put Our Own House in Order") is the Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Carmen Vazquez ("Bursting the Lavender Bubble") was born in Puerto Rico. She is San Francisco's coordinator of lesbian/gay health services. One of her essays will appear in *Backfire,* an anthology on homophobia to be published this fall by Beacon Press.

WHEN THE SPIRIT MOVES US

Kelly Gabriel Lee & Rüdiger Busto

We may stomp the dance floor to the infectious rhythm of Madonna singing about the "material world," but it seems that gay men and lesbians can be "moved" just as much on the non-material plane—if not by that "other" Madonna, then certainly by other personally adapted manifestations of the transcendent. 648 *OUT/LOOK* readers confessed their spiritual or religious proclivities in response to our Queery featured in Issue 11 (Winter 1991). Among our respondents, gender differences throughout the survey were negligible. It's important to note, of course, that those readers interested in the topic were more likely to have responded to the Queery than those who were not. In fact, almost a third of the respondents who identified with a religious or spiritual community said that they held leadership positions within that community.

One thing that particularly marked the results was the strong distinction our readers made between spirituality and religion. In a letter returned with one Queery, a reader described spirituality quite simply: "I actually consider anything that makes me feel *whole* (complete in mind, body, and spirit) to be part of my spiritual life." Could religion, we wonder, ever meet that demand?

Our Queery was designed to address three general areas: personal beliefs and practices, the impact of AIDS on personal beliefs, and our relationship to institutionalized religion. Some of the questions were drawn from two other religion studies—a 1988 national Gallup poll and a San Francisco *Chronicle* Poll. We wanted to see how and where respondents to our Queery compared with the broader, presumably "straighter" national and regional American public.

What We Believe: Personal Beliefs and Practices

The gay and lesbian community takes a much more favorable view toward spirituality than toward organized religion (see Table 1). Eighty-four percent of our respondents rated spirituality as very or somewhat important to them—as compared to fifty-two percent who considered religion so. This seemed to be more true for baby boomers—those in their teens or twenties during the 1960s—than for pre- or post-boomers (see Table 2). Neither Gallup nor the *Chronicle* poll asked respondents to make a distinction between spirituality and religion, and we can only guess to what degree their respondents conflated the two terms; in any case, eighty-six percent of those surveyed by Gallup indicated that religion was "somewhat" to "very important," and seventy-eight percent of those in the *Chronicle* poll surveyed indicated so.

The number of *OUT/LOOK* readers who said they believed in God or some transcendent spiritual being differed only slightly from national or regional percentages. Two-thirds of our respondents believe in a transcendent God—and 85 percent of those pray to such an entity (this percentage also varied only slightly from the national and regional norms). Three times as many as the national percentage were sure they did not believe in God, however, suggesting that there are more atheists among lesbians and gays than in a broader sampling.

More than half of our readers shared a belief in earth consciousness—the idea that nature has its own kind of wisdom, and nearly half believed humans can make some sort of supernatural contact. Again, the results held most true among the baby boom age group, suggesting a "New Age" influence, particularly on that generation. Our readers weren't as sure, however, about the idea of reincarnation, and they were even more skeptical about astrology (see Diagrams A–D). In all of the above cases, the responses were very similar to those of the national and regional polls. That thirty-two percent of the *OUT/LOOK* respondents said they had consulted a psychic, channeler, shaman, or trance medium—as opposed to eight percent of the *Chronicle* respondents—suggests a stronger-than-average interest in "New Age" thinking among lesbians and gay men.

We were also interested in finding out if our readers believed that there is a uniquely gay/lesbian spirituality. In recent years, we have seen the publication of books and essays proclaiming or implying a gay/lesbian spirituality—by Judy Grahn, Mark Thompson, John McNeill, S.J., Paula Gunn Allen, and Arthur Evans, among others. The responses we received, however, were surprisingly mixed. Almost half (forty-two percent) didn't think lesbians and gays were uniquely spiritual, while a third (thirty-three percent) answered yes. One reader offered an interesting view: "While I do not believe that there is a 'uniquely gay/lesbian spirituality,' I do believe that gays and lesbians are in a better position to receive heightened spirituality by virtue of their position among the oppressed." Another reader observed that growing up "different" and searching for others like ourselves leads to the development of a "third eye" which opens us up to spiritual awareness.

Does AIDS Have a Meaning?

Exactly how AIDS and the deaths of so many in the gay and lesbian community may have influenced our religious or spiritual beliefs is, of course, of pressing interest. Survey respondents, some of whom submitted eloquent letters, concluded that AIDS is an illness that in itself has no deeper or spiritual meaning. Readers overwhelmingly rejected the idea that "AIDS is meant to raise our consciousness, open our hearts and minds," a view promoted by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her book, *AIDS: The Ultimate Challenge.* They also rejected the idea that AIDS was created by a destructive lifestyle as suggested by Louise Hay in her book, *You Can Heal Your Life.* The most common response to the AIDS and spirituality topic was summarized by a reader from the Union Theological Seminary in New York, who said: "Persons whose lives are touched by AIDS may find some spiritual meaning in their lives that they did not have before, but that does not mean that the spiritual meaning is in AIDS itself. I think our *response* to AIDS in our own lives is where the meaning may be found; not in the disease." Similarly, a reader from Santa Cruz wrote, "I believe grief and suffering, while not *innately* spiritual, can be a means to deepen spiritual understanding."

Over three-fourths of all respondents (seventy-seven percent) stated that their belief in God or a spiritual force has not been affected by the epidemic, although twenty percent did note a significant or somewhat increased belief in God or a spiritual force as a result of AIDS. It is worth noting that of the total number of respondents to the queery, only one and a half percent identified themselves as having been diagnosed with AIDS or ARC and only five percent as being HIV-positive.

Institutional Religion and the Homo-Sacred

Finally, just to see where we "came from" and how far we've "gone," we asked our readers about their affiliations to religious institutions. The great

Table 1:
How important is religion in your life?
How important is spirituality in your life?

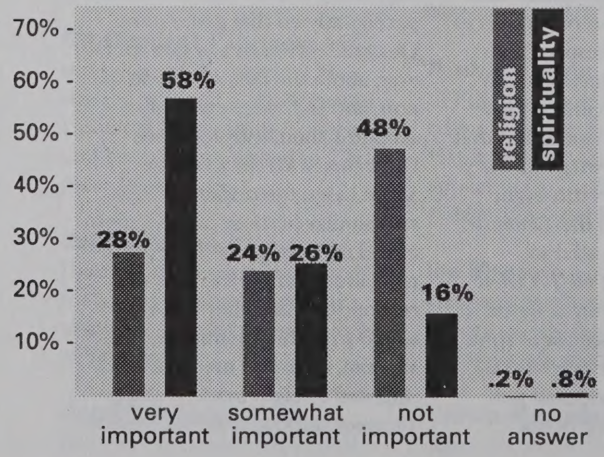
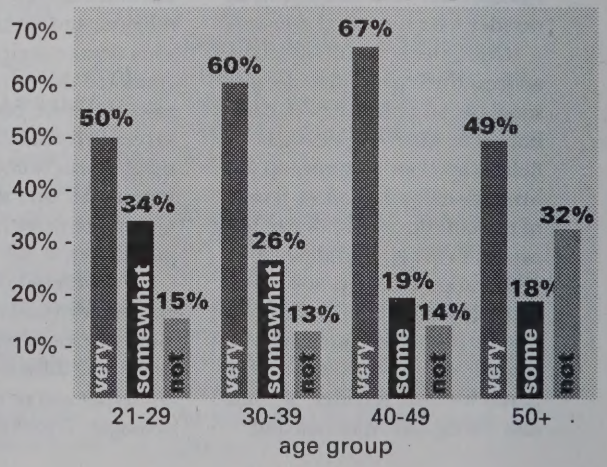


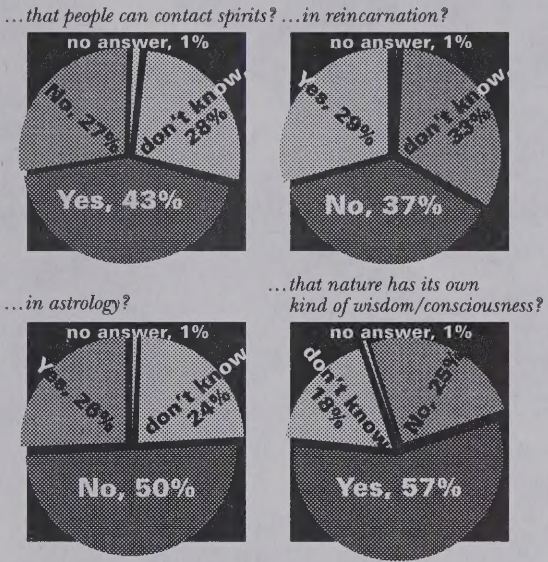
Table 2:
How important is spirituality in your life?
(by age group: the baby boomers find spirituality more important than other age groups do)



majority (eighty-three percent) had been raised in a Christian tradition—of those, the largest percentage were Protestant (thirty-six percent), and a significant number were Roman Catholic (thirty percent); eleven percent were raised according to the Jewish faith. Less than ten percent reported that they were raised with no traditional religious upbringing. However, most of our readers seem to have left the religious institutions of their youth. Now a paltry six percent remain Roman Catholic, twenty-two percent Protestant/other Christian, and six percent practice Judaism. Fourteen percent indicated membership in recovery programs, the same percentage placed themselves in the "alternative/other" category, and twelve percent called themselves "gay Christian" (probably Metropolitan Community Church). We received responses from only three Muslims, nineteen Buddhists, four Hindus, and five fundamentalist/evangelicals.

Over a third of our readers no longer identify themselves with any religious/spiritual community. The same percentage of respondents distinguished spirituality as more important in their lives than religion. Those two figures combined make a strong case for significant dissatisfaction among gays and lesbians with institutionalized religion—obviously, many have instead found spiritual fulfillment and guidance in a more personally directed way.

Table 4:
Do you believe…


…that people can contact spirits?

…in reincarnation?

…in astrology?

…that nature has its own kind of wisdom/consciousness?

Of those who considered themselves members of a spiritual or religious community, a staggering forty-one percent said their community was "extremely" supportive of homosexuality. Eighteen percent said their community was "very" supportive, and fourteen percent characterized their community as "somewhat" supportive of gays. Only twelve percent said "not very" or "not at all." It's not surprising, then, that over half of those respondents said over seventy-five percent of the people in their community knew they were gay. Clearly, an overwheming majority of gays and lesbians who continue to participate in religious services do so when they are able to openly express their homosexuality. This helps to explain the popularity (as well as the importance) of churches like MCC. There are, though, a great number of gays and lesbians who remain estranged by organized and institutionalized religion, and who seem intent on following their own bliss. Whether or not any of us are pursuing a uniquely gay/lesbian spirituality, however, remains to be answered (twenty-three percent responded "don't know" if there is such a thing). Until then, we'll just keep on dancing….

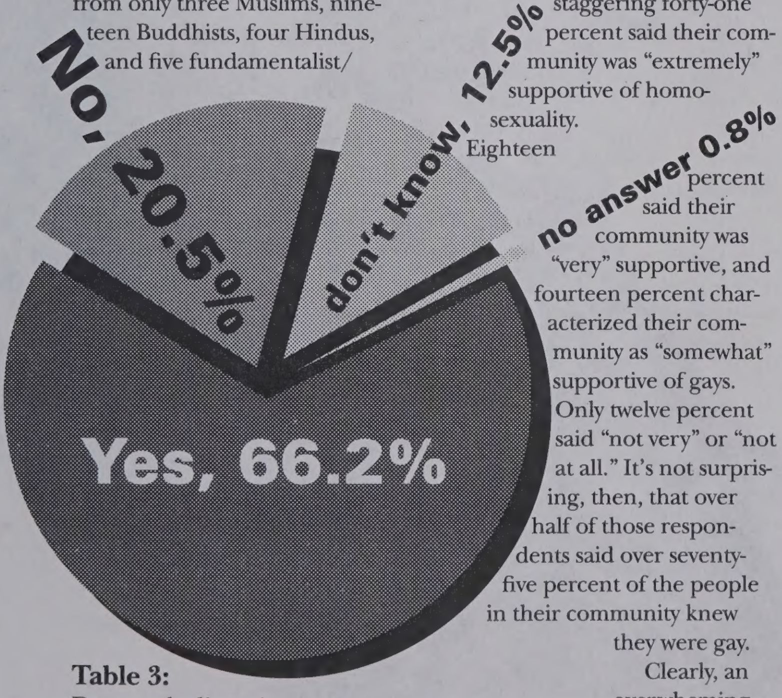


Table 3:
Do you believe in God, or in some transcendent spiritual form?

OUT LOOK

OUT/LOOK Editorial Survey

We've been publishing now for three-and-a-half years. It's always incredibly valuable to get your editorial feedback. Please fill out this questionnaire and send it back to us.

First a few questions about your reading of *OUT/LOOK*:

1. How many of the last 4 issues of *OUT/LOOK* have you read or looked through?
1 of the last 4 issues ___
2 of the last 4 issues ___
3 of the last 4 issues ___
All of the last 4 issues ___
None of the last 4 issues ___

2. How did you receive this issue of *OUT/LOOK*?
Purchased at newsstand/bookstore ___
Current subscriber ___
Received from someone else ___

3. Considering all the times you pick it up, about how much total time do you usually spend in reading or looking through a typical issue of *OUT/LOOK*?
Less than 30 minutes ___
30-59 minutes ___
1 to under 1.5 hours ___
1.5 to under 2 hours ___
2 to under 2.5 hours ___
2.5 to under 3 hours ___
3 to under under 4 hours ___
4 hours or more ___

4. How long have you been reading *OUT/LOOK*?
Less than 1 year ___
1 year ___
2 years ___
Since the first year of publication ___

5. What did you do with the last issue of *OUT/LOOK* that you and other members of your household finished reading?
Saved the entire issue ___
It went to a waiting room ___
Saved selected articles ___
Discarded it ___
Passed it to friends/relatives ___
Other ______________
(Please specify)

6. Not including yourself, how many other males and females residing in your household also read or look through *OUT/LOOK*?
(Please indicate the number of other readers in each of the listed gender and age categories. If "NONE" for particular category write "0.")

	Male	Female
Under 18 years of age	___	___
18 to 29 years old	___	___
30 to 39 years of age	___	___
40 to 49 years of age	___	___
50 to 59 years of age	___	___
60 years or older	___	___

We would like to know what you think about *OUT/LOOK*'s editorial content:

7. What 3 articles did you like best in the last 4 issues of *OUT/LOOK*?
____
____
____

8. What 3 articles did you like the least in the last 4 issues of *OUT/LOOK*?
____
____
____

9. What, in general, do you like **best** about *OUT/LOOK*?
____
____
____

10. What, in general, do you like **least** about *OUT/LOOK*?
____
____
____

11. What other kind of features would you like to see in *OUT/LOOK*?
(Please check all that apply.)
Book reviews ___
More interviews ___
Video reviews ___
Movie reviews ___
Regular columnists ___
Self-Improvement ___
More investigative reporting ___
More political articles ___
More poetry ___
More Fiction ___
Other______________
(Please specify)

12. In your opinion, what are the most important issues facing the lesbian and gay communities today?
____
____
____

13. What articles and/or authors would you like to see in future issues of *OUT/LOOK*?
____
____
____

14. What kind(s) of community organization(s) do you participate in? (Use numbers to identify your participation: (1) you hold an office in your organization, (2) you are an active member, (3) you are a "paper" or dues-paying member only.)
AIDS organization ___
lesbian/gay organization ___
social service organization ___
athletic group or team ___
academic group ___
relgious organization ___
cultural organization ___
other (______________) ___
(Write in)

We would like to know what you think about *OUT/LOOK*'s visual content:

15. Overall, how would rate the layout and design of *OUT/LOOK*'s most recent issues?
__Excellent __Good __Fair __Poor __Not sure

16. What do you like **best** about *OUT/LOOK*'s visual appearance?
____
____
____

17. What do you like **least** about *OUT/LOOK*'s visual appearance?
____
____
____

18. What kind of art work or visual material would you like to see in future issues? *(Indicate the names of artists and illustrators please.)*
____
____
____

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Demographics:

20. Are you male or female?
___ 1 Male ___2 Female

21. Which of the following categories best describes your sexual orientation?
___ 1 Gay or lesbian
___ 2 Bisexual
___ 3 Heterosexual

22. What is your current HIV status?
___ 1 Diagnosed AIDS/ARC
___ 2 HIV-postive
___ 3 HIV-negative
___ 4 Don't know

23. What is your age? ___ years

24. What is your race?
____ 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
____ 2 Black/African American
____ 3 Hispanic/Latin
____ 4 Native American
____ 5 White
____ 6 Mixed race
____ 7 Other (Please specify):
____

25. Please estimate your total personal income for all of 1990. (Please include income from all sources, eg. salary, bonuses, share of profits, investment income, interest, rental income, etc.)
$______________

26. Where do you live?
City: ______________________
State: ______________________

Thank you.

Please use additional paper to provide us with any additional thoughts or comments you may have about *OUT/LOOK*.

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INTERVIEWS

John Dibelka

X

**What do you do with
your ex-lover's lover? Smile?
Compare notes? Or fuck?**